

Illicit Affairs

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Illicit Affairs

by [EarthsickWithoutYou](#)

Summary

AU in which Will is living a quiet, safe, but deeply conflicted life in Maine, married to Molly but secretly longing for his dark Becoming. Mired in self-hatred and despair, he seeks comfort in the church. But things get very complicated once he meets the new priest at his parish, Father Hannibal Lecter.

Notes

cw: smoking, brief references to self-harm

Lead me not into temptation

*"Did I make me up, or make the face till it stuck?
I do the best imitation of myself"*

-Ben Folds

*"For all the times I can't reverse
For all the places where it hurts
I need a little church"*

-Aly & AJ

Will stepped into the church, out of the cold, harsh light of day, feeling immediately embraced by nostalgic comfort and the hope for grace. In here, it was pleasantly dark. The quiet pews were occupied by only the most devout parishioners who would attend a late morning confession, then complete the assigned number of prayers to finish absolving their sins.

He breathed in incense which smelled of pine, tea tree and myrrh, and looked to the stained glass windows with their depiction of Jesus' sacrificial ordeals on the way to the cross. The bright jewel tones of the glass refracted the muted sunlight to cast pretty maroon and gold shadows over the church's interior, like secret treasure. No other place had this influence over Will, this thrall. It had always been his one constant; no matter how many times his father moved them when he was a child, Will could always find a church.

In this moment, he let himself be held by the idea that his savior was present in this space, even physically inhabiting the tabernacle left out on the altar. On the large crucifix above the altar, Jesus' eyes were princely and patient, enduring the pain because He loved the world enough to die for it. Will tried to draw that strength into himself, into his own weakening resolve, his frustrating human frailty, the restless search that had never yet known a moment's satisfaction, the search for real, tangible meaning and connection, to believe himself worthy of love, to be able to love the way he wanted to, fully and freely.

Perhaps it was all in vain, these daily trips to the church, but he didn't know where else to go. There didn't seem to be another safe outlet for his unhappiness, so even if he was unworthy, he remembered Jesus choosing to dine with sinners and he let himself enjoy the numbing soothe of familiarity in the environment.

When he saw that the confessional booth was available, Will stepped behind the heavy velvet curtain and knelt down. He breathed into the mysterious shadows, blinking through the hazy latticework of the partition to see only the barest hint of his confessor's features. Just a flash of dark eyes smoldering, perhaps only the work of his overactive imagination. Father O'Brien had green eyes in a wanly stoical face.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned," Will began shakily because it had been an especially difficult time and he needed this confession to cleanse him, the way he needed air in his lungs

and blood in his veins, *please let me be forgiven*. “It has been two days since my last confession, and these are my sins.”

“Proceed, my child,” said an unfamiliar voice, making Will jolt into immediate disapproval and fear.

It wasn’t Father O’Brien’s voice, like worn-thin pages of a battered old Bible, no, this was a luscious, deep, rumbling voice with an exotic accent he couldn’t place.

Will glared through the holes in the partition between them, catching strange glimpses of sharp cheekbones and full lips, a flash of teeth like fangs.

“Who the hell are you?” Will blurted, shocking himself with the strength of his dismay.

Oh, great, now he’d sworn, at a priest no less -- he’d added another sin to his list of wrongs committed against the Almighty, jeopardizing his eternal redemption for the millionth time, *during confession*, no less!

To his further surprise, there came a low, husky chuckle in response, free from judgement. “I’m sorry if my presence startled you, my child. Father O’Brien has been reassigned due to the unexpected departure of the pastor at St. John and Paul. As you may know, that is a very large parish, and the Bishop thought Father O’Brien’s experience would match their needs. I was deemed a suitable replacement for this more quiet parish, and so I am the new pastor, Father--”

“No,” Will interrupted the calm, even friendly explanation with a hard shake of his head. He almost stumbled away, jerked the curtain aside and fled the church.

When he was outside again, lurching for his car, he asked himself why his reaction had been so extreme. Was it the betrayal of not having his usual confessor, the one he’d come to rely on to anesthetize his neverending soul ache of grave, unacted-upon sins? Or was it the sound of this new priest’s voice, heady and sensuous, the brief glimpses of his elegant features breaking the darkness, yet seeming at one with the shadows?

The idea that he was slowly going crazy, that his mind was simply decomposing into wild conjectures of madness and forbidden inspirations, was nothing new. So Will drove away, needing time to think, to decide if he could ever go back to the church.

When he got home, he said nothing to Molly of the bizarre encounter. She knew of his devout ways, but not of the frequency of his confessions, a habit which would seem very suspicious. How damning, to need to purge oneself of evil that often, just to be clean enough to present himself to her, to Walter. Yet he feared he could never be clean.

So he made only the barest small talk, knowing she saw the melancholy set of his smile with concern. The only way to make it better, he reasoned once again, was to give of himself to her, to whatever extent he could.

It was an unspoken apology for awful things he would never do, that Molly must never know festered within him, twisted and gnarled like weeds too insidiously strong to be sliced away

by his long-suffering conscience. Thoughts of discontent in their relationship despite Molly's perfect kindness, her sweet face and angelic tolerance of his awkwardness and confusion. Thoughts of another love that might exist for him, with someone who would not be afraid of his worst desires, the secret, smothered bloodlust. That other person could not possibly exist outside his selfish fantasies, and worse yet, how could he be so ungrateful to Molly for loving him, choosing him as a husband when a wonderful, beautiful woman like her could have her pick of partners who were *good* and trustworthy -- he was depraved; he was one of those *things* who were sometimes born in hospitals and never should be, a demon in human skin, unlovable at his depths.

Will knew it was a sin to hate himself, but it was so hard to help it sometimes.

He helped Molly get ready for the dinner party she had organized that evening, a get-together of the families from their neighborhood whom she considered "their friends."

In fact, he despised social occasions (which she knew, but why should she deprive herself of such normal pleasures in life, simply because they made Will want to hide under a rock?), but he had learned to put on a decent show of being A Good Host. It mainly involved opening the door, smiling with pleasant greetings (fake smile, *hypocrite*; everyone's face only looked like a mask to him, his own face most of all). Then he could help with serving food and drink, squeeze Molly's hand and kiss her cheek at appropriate intervals, light the indoor fireplace in coldest winter and the fire pit in the backyard during the other seasons. And mercifully, in a small show of God's grace upon him, Will would usually be free after that to slink into some solitary nook in his home, or use the excuse of walking the dogs to disappear and leave the good humans of the world to their celebrations.

Will didn't expect tonight to be any different, as he shrugged on a dark grey button-down shirt and black pants, slicking his wet hair back from his lonely, frightened face in the mirror. He was alone, so it was okay to look lonely; Molly didn't have to know. His jaw already ached from the amount of smiles he was about to force, but he'd taken as long a shower as he possibly could to defer the inevitable. It was time.

Downstairs, the house was warm with quiet folk music and the crackling fireplace, and he went into the kitchen to take the chicken wings and roasted chickpeas out of the oven. He arranged them attractively on one platter and took the cold appetizers out of the fridge, the caprese salad stacks and fruit salad which Molly had made that afternoon.

She was lovely, bustling into the kitchen with her glossy hair piled on her head in a high messy bun, her bright red party dress and heels clicking the floor. With a grin, she said, "You know, I think Keelan's going to propose to Melanie soon. Caught her looking at rings on her phone at the PTA meeting yesterday."

"Well, that'll be nice for them," Will reasoned, pushing a spoon into the large fruit salad bowl.

He looked down at his own wedding ring and tried not to question the point of matrimony. Surely it wasn't designed to warp all of your best intentions into the worst outcomes; it only

felt that way.

Molly deserved better from him than this line of thinking. He redirected himself. “How was the PTA meeting, by the way? I forgot to ask.”

“Boring,” Molly laughed, a bottle of wine in each hand. “Could have used some of this to get through it. That gym teacher Mr. Henderson...”

“Sour-faced monotone guy?” Will put in.

“Yeah, he lectured us for almost an hour about all the reasons he thinks they should defund the Art department. I guess we’ve got a new priest and he was there, I thought he was going to eat Henderson for lunch after that rant. Anyway, New Priest let Henderson have it and *then* some. Said his disrespect for the Arts and Humanities departments was shameful. *That* was worth waiting for. If Father O’Brien had been there, he probably would have fallen asleep, and when he woke up, Henderson would have converted the Art classroom into an indoor tennis court.”

“I take it the annual student art exhibit event is alive and well, then,” Will chortled, acting casual although her story about the new pastor made him almost drop the large glass bowl full of fruit on the floor.

“You bet, Wally will be thrilled.” Molly winked as they carried the food and wine into the living room.

Just then, the front door opened and closed, the sound accompanied as it often was by the sound of dogs barking and Walter fondly hushing their excited announcement of their return.

“Oh, good, you’re back,” Molly enthused, greeting her son with an affectionate hair ruffle. He grinned at his mother like he always did, trusting and sincere. “Honey, can you get the dogs settled? Then you get to relax, and I won’t even object if you and Miles disappear downstairs to use Playstation during the whole party.”

“Sure, Mom,” Walter shrugged, and Will did his best to add an appropriate greeting, continuing their sense of being a family.

“Thanks for taking them out, Walter,” Will ventured a bit too formally.

“Anytime!” Walter said lightly, barely making eye contact with Will. He whistled for the dogs to follow and took them down to the finished basement, where the tv, gaming systems and dog pillows were.

Walter was neither resentful, nor trustful of his stepfather. Will thought the kid had an excellent sixth sense and probably knew there was something inherently wrong about him, but tolerated his presence since Molly wanted him there -- and of course, for the dogs, who came with Will. Walter adored the dogs; it was the only thing apart from fishing and wanting to make Molly happy that ever allowed them to bond.

The guests arrived, couples and families filing cheerfully in as Will followed in the footsteps of his established routine, taking coats, bestowing plastic smiles, enduring the occasional whispered comment as he walked away, *"Always so quiet," "Heard he used to work for the FBI," "He's handsome but strange, what's his deal?,"* and his personal favorite, *"what the hell does Molly see in him?"*

He was used to the murmurs; this far north was blissfully removed from Quantico, but certain ghosts could never be fully left behind; they clung to him like dust, no one else knew how shameful. He hadn't left his profiling job and teaching about criminal minds because he was traumatized by the work, even though that was the story he'd sold to Molly and tried to sell himself. In fact, he'd left because he liked being in a killer's mind far too much. He left seeking a new beginning, a baptism.

Maine was beautiful country, a place to ramble along with the dogs, find work fixing boats, breathe in the fresh air and become a whole, functioning person. He'd even been lucky enough to meet Molly and find that they got along well, sharing laughs and a mutual fondness for the simple, relaxed life he wanted so badly to want. Yet to this day, Will was afraid the new start had not taken, like a failed inoculation. The dreams, painted with black blood, broken bones and glorious hunger in the hunt, had never left his harrowed mind. They were the only real joy of his life, no matter how desperately he fought to make them leave.

"Honey," Molly beckoned to him when he came out of their bedroom after depositing the latest round of slightly snow-damp coats on the bed. "Come here, there's someone you should meet."

Will strode forward not expecting anything too interesting; he recognized the backs-of-heads of a few parents whose kids also went to Walter's school, and there was something else they had in common, the same local Catholic parish...oh, no. His stomach sank as he recognized the stranger beside them much too late to do anything about it but continue the introduction.

The tall man who had been jovially conversing with Molly and her friends was broad-shouldered, with an obviously muscular, yet elegant physique filling out his formal black priest attire in a very striking way, especially because of his sleek facial features, the deep, dark set of his soulful eyes, and the powerful confidence of his entire demeanor. This was a man who was one hundred percent comfortable in his own skin, something Will could not relate to in the least. How would that actually feel?

"This is the new pastor at St. Luke's, Father Hannibal Lecter," Molly said, looking oblivious to Will's mortification. "Father Lecter, this is my husband, Will Graham."

Well, there was always the hope this priest would not remember their all-too-brief aborted confession from that morning.

Father Lecter absolutely beamed, giving Will a strong handshake as Will's calluses briefly scraped the smoother skin of the priest's large hand. The grip was cool and reassuring against his fever flesh, and for a moment Will did not want to pull away, but he did, with a confused nod.

"I believe your husband and I have already met, Molly," the priest announced, as if this was the most delightful coincidence imaginable.

"I stopped in for a few prayers this morning," Will blurted nonsensically, shit, that was a lie but he didn't want Molly to know about the confession.

Now he'd sinned twice right in front of this priest. What a great impression he must be making.

Father Lecter looked unfazed. "The church is always open to those who wish to bask in the Lord's holy grace. It was, and is, very nice to make your acquaintance, Will."

Will nodded again like a stupid jack-in-the-box and wondered, for some unknown reason, how he looked. He hadn't put any special effort into his appearance tonight, but with those amber eyes that were now locked to his lost blue gaze, he suddenly wished he could check the mirror, make sure there was nothing stuck in his teeth, that his curls hadn't gone too wild once they dried, like they always seemed to.

He realized he was supposed to say something else now, that Molly, her friends, and Father Lecter were all looking at him due to the natural pause in the conversation which had been left for him to reply.

"Oh, um, nice to meet you, too, uhhh, welcome, Father." He smiled, although it felt like a grimace and probably looked somewhat like one too. His heart was beating too fast, it was hot in here, too many people, he wanted to get away.

He thought suddenly of the pack of cigarettes he'd bought in a flash of defiance after he fled the church. What he needed now was a little tiny taste of something wrong, to take the edge off all this pretending to be good.

"I'm just going to go out and get some more firewood for later," Will announced.

Everyone apparently seemed to accept this excuse, and soon enough, Will found himself hiding behind the house, lighting his cigarette like a rebellious teenager. The yard looked immense, an expanse of black near-wilderness once it extended past the reach of the outside lights. There was the neat red shed with the woodpile and the axe nearby all ready for him to make his lame excuse into a reality. What an idiotic idea, to have a smoke and then exert himself by chopping kindling.

Still, the soft plastic of the cigarette pack felt good in his hand, something he could use to hurt himself in the way some people cut their own flesh; he wasn't brave enough for that, but this was a wrong thing that was not technically recognized as a sin. He would taste the immature foolishness of the act; maybe he'd even get addicted, although he'd had his fair share of stolen cigarettes during his adolescence, and they had never particularly made him crave more.

"Do you think you might spare one of those?" A husky voice asked, and Will looked up with the cigarette in his mouth and his hand cupped over the lighter to see Father Lecter standing there, watching him intently.

“Um, sure,” he said in a fluster of overwhelmed bewilderment.

The priest took a cigarette from Will as their fingers brushed, and as he passed the lighter, Will tried to convince himself it was the cold wind of the night that made him shiver.

For a few minutes they stood with their backs lightly pressed to the house and smoked. Will couldn't taste the tobacco or the cold air or really anything but a new kind of suspense. He eyed the priest's nonchalant expression, the noble set of his profile, the silver strands in his light brown hair that glimmered in the moonlight like magic threads. The way the white of his collar seemed to strain against the strength of his throat, and how his lips closed around the cigarette, drawing in the nicotine and danger, blowing it back out.

Father Lecter licked his lips, glancing over at his parishioner.

“Thank you, Will.” He gestured with the cigarette as Will tried to summon cogent thought.

“No problem. Guess I owe you an apology, about this morning.”

The priest was as calm as a windless day at sea. “Not as far as I am concerned.”

“Father, I *swore* right in front of you, in the confessional, no less.” Will's cheeks flamed with embarrassment. “I was so rude to you.”

“You were startled,” the priest shrugged.

Upon closer examination, Will supposed the man must be about ten years his senior, or so he might surmise by the light crinkles around his eyes when he smiled. Will didn't think he would ever have self-possession like this man, even if he lived to be a hundred.

“It's perfectly understandable,” Father Lecter continued. “I will forgive you, if you promise not to run from me again.”

Will ignored the promise idea rather conveniently. “Thanks for understanding. I like to go into the church during the week. It makes me feel...it's comforting. Guess it's obvious I'm looking for a little salvation.” He huffed a laugh, the hollow sound echoing off the air.

“God loves you very much, Will.” Father Lecter spoke softly, hitting exactly on the most raw nerve inside Will. “He will always welcome you back. He is ever delighted by your presence in His house.”

“You say that as if you can tell I doubt His love for me.”

“While I don't wish to brag, I like to think I've been a priest long enough to sense certain things about people. I also do not wish to intrude. If you'd like me to drop the subject and leave you in peace, I will.”

Will sighed. “The short version of the story is, I'm kind of a mess. Mind keeping this between us, even though we're not in the confessional?”

“Of course, Will. Anything you say to me is protected by the strictest confidentiality. I am your pastor now, your link to God. If you lean on me, I won’t let you down.”

“That’s very kind. It’s just that I feel so unlovable sometimes, you know? I have this wonderful life, everything a man could want, and I should be happy. Instead I’m torn apart inside.” His voice broke and he realized he might cry if the subject didn’t change soon.

He crushed his cigarette stub under his heel, frustrated with himself, wishing he hadn’t said so much. In his overeager rush to hurt himself, he’d sucked the cigarette down too quickly, and the burn in his lungs made it harder to fight the stinging tears spilling past his eyelashes.

“I know we’ve only just met, Will, but I can assure you that you are anything but unlovable, or unloved.”

Will’s wet eyes roved over the priest’s serious, reassuring expression. “I can’t talk about this,” he sighed, brushing a few tears away, feeling so foolish and exposed. “Not here. Can we talk about something else instead?”

“Anything you like,” Father Lecter said brightly.

“Where are you from?”

The priest smiled as if it pleased him that he had piqued Will’s curiosity. “Lithuania, but I have not been back in many years. I travelled the world in my ministry, bringing the Lord’s word to many far-flung and fascinating places.”

It did not escape Will’s notice that Father Lecter seemed to immediately change the subject away from his homeland. Using the same sharply honed skill set Will once applied to criminal profiling, it was easy to see how the priest used his sophisticated flair for speaking to place the listener’s attention where he found it convenient, distracting them from any topics he did not care to discuss in detail.

The priest had noticed Will watching him incisively, but he concluded with the same perfectly charismatic composure, “Most recently, His call has landed me here, on American shores.”

“What made you decide to become a priest?” Will asked.

“More of an academic inclination than anything else, although I do enjoy the chance to help others and build a community of faith.” The priest puffed on his cigarette thoughtfully. “I’ve always been fascinated by God, by his power, his mysteries. And so I chose to live as close to Him as I could, to better understand and explore that light. Of course, to understand the Lord is to understand the Devil. Both concepts draw me irresistibly, the compelling dichotomy of light and dark, with humanity caught in between. Forgive me, I’m rambling. You asked a simple question...”

“No, it’s...” Will almost said, *I like to hear you talk*. And he did; the priest’s voice was like a blanket, shutting off his fearful shudders. He wished to keep it near. “I don’t mind,” he managed to say instead.

“You thought about becoming a priest at one point, didn’t you?”

“Wow, is my Catholic angst really that obvious?” Will looked at him, amazed at the astute guess.

“Yes.” Father Lecter leaned in towards him slightly with a smile that was amused, friendly, and perhaps most accurately labelled “conspiratorial,” but all Will could think as he blushed at it was, *sexy*.

Oh, no, was the only thought Will had time to process in response. Was *that* why his heart was beating so fast?

No, no, no--

“Why then did you decide against the priesthood?” Father Lecter inquired, acting as if Will’s nervous demeanor was completely normal.

“I didn’t think I deserved to be that close to God.” Will frowned, making himself picture this sudden attraction to the handsome priest as a piece of paper he could crumple up tightly, hide somewhere deep inside him. It was disgraceful that he could betray Molly with lustful thoughts about another.

It was also the third sin he had committed in the priest’s presence: *thou shalt not covet*.

“Again, I think God would disagree, but a call to family life is equally holy. You have a lovely place here.”

“I do,” Will nodded. “I just wish I didn’t somehow feel...like St. Peter or Thomas, always doubting, never satisfied. Questioning the very grace that could save me.”

“Which disciple do you want to be like?” Father Lecter smiled gently. “We all have one whom we admire and emulate above the rest. Who is yours, Will?”

“I wish I...I always wanted to be...” Will swallowed; his throat felt raw. He hadn’t meant to get personal like this again, sharing something he’d never told anyone. “I want to be like the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved.”

“That perfect devotion,” the priest acknowledged. “It is probably John referring to himself in the Gospel, an act of more than slight egotism on his part, but there is no denying the beautiful relationship portrayed between that Disciple and our dear Lord. An almost romantic bond, elevating the earthy to the divine.”

Will felt his face going hot and patted at his cheek, trying in vain to cool it down with his sweaty hand. *Jesus*, he thought, not in the holy way.

That’s sin number four.

“It’s alright to want to be loved for who we really are,” said Father Lecter. “The Lord made you exactly the way you are for a good reason, my child.”

Oh, that whole *my child* thing was going to be a problem. It felt like a fingertip dragging down Will's spine; it felt like heat coiling in his low belly.

"May I come back to confession soon? I appreciate you talking with me, and it seems like you understand some of the things I'm struggling with." Will did his best to transform this blossoming need into an appropriate desire to better himself through holy counseling.

Once again, he failed at convincing himself, no matter how good a show he put on for others. No one did a better imitation of Will Graham than Will Graham did, and no one was more hurt by the act.

"I would be greatly honored," Father Lecter smiled, and then he coughed a little, looking at his nearly finished cigarette with a flinch of distaste.

Will stared at him. "You don't really smoke, do you?"

The priest shook his head, nose wrinkling as a cute pout took over his sumptuous lips. "Dear me, no, it's quite terrible, isn't it?"

For the first time in what felt like years, Will grinned without feeling like his face was going to crack. A heartfelt laugh burst from him like a dove flying from a suddenly open cage, his holy spirit, his divinity. His eyes shone, his heart warmed, and Father Lecter laughed too, almost shyly, as if he hadn't expected Will to respond like this and it pleased him deeply.

"I'll see you in church," the priest smiled before he went back inside. Will agreed and they parted with another handshake, but he didn't have to wait to see Father Lecter within the walls of St. Luke's.

He saw him much sooner, in his fitful dreams all night long. He felt the warm clasp of the priest's handshake and imagined those beautiful hands touching him in other places, other ways, ways no man had touched him.

He *felt*, rather than merely saw Father Lecter's lips around the cigarette. It was as though Will was the smoke being drawn into his lungs, but that wasn't good enough. His imagination went wilder seeking satisfaction, conjuring the two of them locked in a hot, wrong, reckless kiss, naked bodies rocking together in a collision of the holy and depraved, the sweetest sin. He heard the priest's sensuous voice murmuring to him of eternal devotion and wicked desires, and when he woke in a shocked sweat beside Molly, he was mortified to find he had come in his sleep, all over his boxers. His whole body still reverberated with pleasure and the fantasy lingered in his sight like the afterflash of a camera.

Thankfully, Molly slept on with a peaceful smile, oblivious to him sinning against her.

Will cleaned himself in the bathroom, then stared at his reflection in the mirror. He looked the same, if a bit flushed and more sexually satisfied than he had ever seen himself, posture relaxed, breathing even, skin glowing. As if someone had just cracked a bone back into place that he never even realized was out of joint. It was wrong in a horrifying way that should add to his state of perpetual dread, but instead he felt an irresistible spark of hope.

Heaven help me to be strong

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will found the church slightly more crowded than usual at Wednesday morning confession. He wasn't surprised that the new pastor was already popular; from his own experience he knew how good it felt to unveil one's sins and fears to Father Lecter and feel entirely heard, seen, and understood.

But while he couldn't blame anyone, Will still felt a twist of jealousy at realizing he wasn't the only one drawn to the priest. He even had a few petty thoughts, such as "*shouldn't all these people be at work?*"

The same might be said of him, but he made his own hours and could also stand to wait a while. He didn't want to rush through his confession, words that would be hard enough to say without the added pressure of knowing that other people were waiting their turn.

Two days had been spent in telling himself he shouldn't go, and the third day found him successfully convincing himself he could get over this silly, misbegotten crush. He decided that the emotion was just a byproduct of making a real connection with someone, a misinterpretation of the profound but platonic bond between parishioner and priest.

Even if they were both free, it would have been an impossible match; what would a beautifully confident man like that ever see in an anxious disaster like Will? It was a preposterous concept.

Will prayed in a pew to the left of the altar, in front of a statue of Mary, until all the other confessions were over. By the time the confessional was free, his knees were sore, but his prayers seemed to be fading into tangents about the priest that filled his mind far too easily, sultry images from his dreams which he should be ashamed to entertain with the Virgin's holy face so close by.

"Will?" said Father Lecter, emerging from the confessional booth to greet him with mild surprise. "Have you been waiting all this time?"

The church was empty except for the two of them. Father Lecter came down the aisle towards Will's pew, his rosary beads swaying gently before his black clerical suit. His demeanor was calm, although there was a glimmer in his eyes that looked almost like excitement.

"I didn't want to have to rush, so I waited for the others to leave." Will shrugged.

Want you all to myself.

"Sorry," he added sheepishly, "when I said that out loud I realized how selfish it sounded. Everyone deserves to have their fair amount of time with you."

You don't belong to me. In fact, I belong to Molly. I belong to Molly.

The thought thudded against his skull, a dull pain. Poor Molly, what could he do?

“Everyone, including you, Will.” The priest smiled, unoffended. “There is nothing wrong with wishing to share your sins without feeling you must do so under pressure of time.”

'Share your sins' seemed an interesting choice of words, as opposed to the standard, 'confess your sins.'

Will relaxed into a smile as well, his shoulders dropping. Father Lecter's presence was like the most tranquil, warm bath he wanted to sink into forever. Drowning would feel awfully good if he could go like that.

“Would you care to go to my office for a face-to-face confession, perhaps over tea?” The priest inquired cordially, making Will's heart skip a beat as he cleared his throat.

“Since we are already acquainted, that is,” Father Lecter added, and Will realized he'd lapsed into silence staring at him again.

“Yes, of course, that would be fine. Thanks,” he said finally, almost leaping to follow the man.

Calm down, you're going to confession, it's not a date. And you're married! He's a priest! Get it together.

Will held it together admirably as Father Lecter led him to the humble pastor's office, and even when the older man briefly rested a hand on his arm to usher him towards the chair in front of the desk, a touch that wasn't entirely necessary and left goosebumps on his skin.

“Do you prefer chamomile, or earl grey?” the priest asked. He filled a teapot with water from the small sink and set it atop the stove.

“Either is fine. You know, Father O'Brien used to joke that the office is so tiny, the stove and sink look like dollhouse furniture.”

Father Lecter chuckled, looking especially splendid in contrast to the meager old appliances. “I see his point. John the Baptist himself might find the accommodations here a bit sparse.”

Will laughed, “The stove looks even smaller with you in front of it, because you're so--”

The priest glanced at him over his shoulder, a light brow lifted.

“Um, tall, you're tall.” Will cleared his throat.

Father Lecter nodded with a serene smile. He made their tea and settled behind his desk, sliding Will's cup and saucer in his direction. Will blew on the hot drink and took a sip, realizing that the pastor had added cream and sugar without asking if that was his preference. There was a quietly domineering attitude in that which made the butterflies in his stomach

reawaken; he felt special and cared for. He felt a hand of control in his destiny to still the chaos.

"Would you like to begin?" The priest folded his distractingly gorgeous hands in front of him on the desk.

"Yes." Will set his teacup down on the saucer, careful not to clatter the china although his hand wanted badly to shake. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been about a week since my last confession, and these are my sins."

"Proceed, my child." And then, as if he could see right through Will, past every attempt to control his anxiety: "And Will, don't worry so much. You are in safe hands here."

"Okay." Will took a deep breath. "Well, I've taken the Lord's name in vain at least a dozen times. I've lied to my wife by omission, because I know I'm not happy in our marriage but I'm too afraid to tell her. I don't want to hurt her."

Father Lecter nodded, watching Will intently. "Please, continue."

"I've had..." Will scratched behind his ear, although he didn't have an itch. He felt his face getting hotter as he admitted, "I've had impure thoughts about someone other than my wife, Father."

Saying the words in that order made the confession seem almost totally direct, almost as if he had said, *I've had sinful, impure, dirty thoughts about you, Father.*

Something had gotten under the priest's skin; he seemed slightly frustrated with Will. "I see. A grave sin, indeed, as the sanctity of marriage is considered to be unbreakable by the Catholic church. You swore to honor your wife for the rest of your days when you were married."

"*I know*," Will said, startled by the priest's severity, although Father Lecter's eyes remained kind. "I know that, of course. I feel terrible about it. That's why I'm here."

"Is it?" The priest asked frankly.

Will stood, thinking he should leave, feeling overcome with the wild cacophony of emotions and needs swirling inside him, screaming for release.

"Will, please, don't lose heart. Sit down and finish your confession." Father Lecter's voice was more of a command than a plea, and it worked on Will like a charm. He stayed put as the priest spoke further.

"Have you acted upon these impure urges, my child?"

"N-no, that is, I haven't spoken of them to the person I was thinking about, not directly. I haven't made a move on them or anything." Will knew this sounded like a pathetic excuse for his sins, but somehow he couldn't help wanting to make himself shinier for Father Lecter, not just a disgusting would-be adulterer.

“Have you touched yourself while thinking of this person who is not your wife?”

Will’s heart squeezed painfully. “No,” he whispered, closing his eyes, wishing he could make this moment disappear. “But, Father, I had an orgasm while dreaming about them.”

A cool touch from the priest’s hand on his own made Will slowly open his eyes again, feeling it was safe to look, that he would not look into the eyes of hellfire, brimstone and judgement.

“Will, you are only human. We all fall down.” Father Lecter’s hand was still on top of his own, almost heavy, restoring the steady breath in his lungs even as it drove Will to further sinful exhilaration.

He wondered what the priest looked like without his Roman collar, wanted to bare his throat and kiss it, open-mouthed and sloppy, taking what he wanted, even sinking his teeth in, making Father Lecter moan for him --

The priest squeezed Will’s hand gently and sat back down behind his desk. “You did not act on your feelings, and you have confessed them. God will forgive you, and you will find no condemnation from me. If you should need to discuss any of your mental transgressions in further detail, to understand their source and how to better resolve them, I would be happy to listen and counsel you as best I can.”

“No, I think it’s best I don’t go into any further detail,” Will decided, agonized by the resounding temptation to do just that, confess the entirety of his filthy lust and allow the priest to decide his punishment.

“Very well, my child. It takes a great deal of strength to admit such a sin. Please forgive yourself once absolved, and say your penance with joy that the Lord has so much love for you, that he will always welcome you back to His embrace. Now, have you any other sins to confess?”

Will nodded. “Just one. I have other sinful thoughts, and I have suffered with them ever since I worked with the FBI a couple of years ago, profiling serial killers. Had to leave the job, even though I was very good at it. I have a natural gift for seeing into the mind of a murderer, um, people have said it’s because I’m so empathetic.”

“That gift sounds like a potential burden as well. Yet the Lord chose to trust you with it; why did you feel you must leave that life behind?”

“Because I liked what I saw, when I looked into the killers’ designs. I thought the brutal things they did to their victims were beautiful, and I started having these recurring dreams -- sometimes waking fantasies, totally immersive, and sometimes nightmares while I was asleep, dreams of *being* a killer. Hurting people who offended me. I still have these thoughts, Father, but I try very hard to repress them.”

“It might be better to speak of them than to smother the dreams,” Father Lecter observed. “You are in danger of suffocating your ability to live in contentment, by denying who you truly are and what you want. That is only another form of falsehood.”

"I can't believe you're taking this so calmly. I've just told you something a hell of a lot worse than having covetous extramarital temptations -- sorry, I didn't mean to swear."

"I'll add on an extra Hail Mary," the priest smiled, warming the knot in Will's stomach until it started to unravel. "And nothing you will tell me is ever going to cause me to change the way I see you, Will."

"How do you see me?" Will asked, unable to resist.

"As a faithful disciple in need of direction."

Will had an automatic vision of the priest standing over him holding one of those long yardsticks used to strike Victorian school children on their bottoms when they misbehaved.

One corner of his mouth turned up. "You know, you're kind of bossy, Father, even for a pastor."

Sternly now, "Really, Will, it is hardly permissible for you to make such comments during confession. Do you trust me as your spiritual leader?"

"I want to," said Will honestly. And almost like a test, he added, "What do you advise me to do about my impure thoughts and violent impulses?"

Father Lecter was more than up to the challenge personified by Will. "Be honest with yourself. Pray. Leave your problems with the Lord and follow the signs He sends you. Remember, Will, it is a beautiful thing to aspire to the divine, but you must not let it lead you to arrogance. Only God is perfect; we mere mortals can never be without flaw."

"Let God guide me." Will nodded slowly. "I have to look for His signs."

"Be aware of *all* signs which appear within your destiny's course," the priest smiled, "Whether they be from the Lord or the Evil One, be vigilantly conscious of the messages they send."

More troubling thoughts crowded in as Will considered the advice. "But, Father...what if the lustful thoughts don't go away? Should I tell Molly about it? We could go to marriage counseling, I guess. I'm so ashamed because part of me wants to let the marriage go. Let Molly go. I don't think we can give each other what we both need."

The priest's eyes darkened. Will noticed that he had barely touched his tea, that his fingers were drawing random designs on the desktop, as if he did not realize he was manifesting these traits of nervousness. "What is it precisely that you need, Will?"

"I...it's very private, Father."

"Very well, my child, but remember that what you share with me is confidential. Is the idea of a potential divorce so tormenting to you that lies seem easier?"

Will almost had to laugh at the way Catholicism was constructed, like a padded cell where no matter which wall he hit, it was a sin. No wonder he fit right into this religion.

“Well, the church says divorce is a sin. That if Molly ever wanted to remarry someday, she’d be committing adultery; she wouldn’t be able to have communion anymore. How could I take that away from her?”

“You seem to have relatively little trouble taking away her right to make up her own fully informed mind on the matter.” The priest’s face looked slightly flushed, as if he wished to say a great deal more but bit his tongue.

“It’s happened, like I knew it would,” Will sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. “I’ve disgusted you. You’re completely right, I’m being so horrible to Molly. Don’t worry, I disgust myself, too.”

“Will.” Still looking very serious, Father Lecter shook his head and clucked his tongue. He stood, circled the desk, and knelt before Will, big hands covering the sinner’s knees. His touch was again cold, like that of a statue, making Will wonder what could ever cause a fissure in the perfect smooth marble of his composure. Yet Will ran so hot himself that he kept finding the cool touches deeply comforting.

“Look at me,” the priest insisted.

Will forced himself to look, although tears made it difficult. “I’m sorry, Father.”

“You are a beautiful child of God, entirely unique, precious.” His grip tightened on Will. “You must do what you feel is best. Your circumstances are very difficult. Please simply know that you need not shoulder your sadness alone.”

A painful constriction between guilt and desire kept Will in misery throughout these kind words. “I’m afraid. I’m so afraid.”

“My child.” Father Lecter lifted up slightly, took Will’s face in his hands, and pressed a soft, quick kiss to his brow.

Oh. Oh-- His lips were not cold like his hands; they were so, so warm and sweet. How Will wanted more, wanted them all over him. But the priest’s words were more like his touch: they offered solace, but nothing deeper.

“Be not afraid. Walk in the ways of the Lord. Place your faith in the church and let me guide you.”

Will’s skin tingled everywhere the priest had touched him. Father Lecter’s gaze was addictive, full of mysterious emotion. His neatly coiffed hair had fallen forward slightly over his brow, and he had never looked so handsome to Will.

“What is my penance?” Will asked, his voice rough with suppressed longing.

“That’s a good boy.” Father Lecter stood, and as he went back to his desk, his eyes were thankfully averted. He did not see the way his words made Will shiver as a thrum of arousal sang through him.

“I’d like you to go back out to the church now, and say your penance,” the priest instructed. Will nodded. “Ten Our Fathers, Five Hail Marys. And do you have a rosary at home, Will?”

“Yes, should I use it? As part of my penance?”

“As part of your journey towards self-love and forgiveness, my child. Please pray the rosary each night before bed. See how this ritual begins to change your feelings. I dearly hope it will bring you comfort.”

“Thank you so much, Father,” Will sighed, deeply glad to have a definite plan of action. “I’ll do just as you say.”

The priest approached Will again, making a cross on the younger man’s forehead where he had kissed him. His fingers were damp with holy water. It felt as wonderful as being called a good boy.

When Will had finished his prayers, he was quietly elated to see that Father Lecter had come out of his office again and was presently on the altar, rearranging some of the books and candles in early preparation for evening mass.

He blessed himself again, looking briefly at Mary, then to Jesus’ face on the crucifix over the altar as if they had any words of advice to guide him in this mad desire he had to speak with the priest again, about anything, everything. If he should not, then why did they do nothing to stop him?

“Thank you again, Father,” Will ventured, lingering by the altar.

“Don’t forget to genuflect before the eucharist, my child,” said Father Lecter, so that Will made a quick, apologetic genuflection, going to his knee as the priest seemed to loom gloriously above him.

“Tell me, Will,” the priest continued, unbothered by Will’s latest mistake, “What are your joys in life, your passions?”

Will was delighted to be invited to stay a bit longer by the impromptu and strangely deep question. “Well, I love to fish. Love my dogs -- really, really love my dogs. They make me happy. I like being out on the water, fixing up boats. Like to make myself useful where I can. It makes me glad when I feel like I’m able to be there for Molly, do something to help her, give her support. And for my stepson, Walter, I try to do the same. It doesn’t always happen, but sometimes I feel that I’ve done my part.”

“You speak of joy, my child, but what of passion?” The priest lit several candles, moving with his usual fluid elegance, but Will got the feeling the older man needed to keep moving, lest his own feelings become too obvious.

“As I mentioned during confession, Father, my passions are a problem. There’s that someone I’ve had impure thoughts of, they make me feel passion. The violent dreams, too, in them I

feel so alive, it frightens me.”

Father Lecter came down from the altar and looked at him intently. “Tell me of your nightmares.”

“I see awful things, Father. I tear people to pieces, I rip their hearts out. I lick their fresh corpses. I’m naked in the moonlight, deep in some barbaric forest, howling like an animal, elated. Please--” Will sighed, “Don’t be afraid of me. I would never act on these urges.”

“Any more than you would touch the one who brings you passion,” The priest smiled.

“You almost sound like you’re condoning my sinful thoughts.” Will swallowed. “But the Bible says, ‘If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.’”

“We are no longer in confession, Will.” Father Lecter patted his cheek. “In my informed priestly opinion, you may forgo such extreme measures in favor of simply admitting you are mortal and prey to earthly sins and temptations. Find ways to channel the urges that can bring you some peace.”

“Like the rosary?” Will asked, fascinated.

“Yes,” the priest affirmed, cheerful, as if he fully believed Will would pull through his crisis and come out a better man for his struggles. “To begin. Do you miss helping others the way you did when you worked for the FBI?”

“I miss saving lives,” Will replied. “Miss it a lot. I feel guilty I had to stop doing it because of what it was doing to *me*.”

“Then how would you like to help out around the parish, to give you that old rush back? We do a lot to help people here all the time.”

Will tried to ignore the way his heart was throbbing at the idea that the priest wanted him around more often. He told himself he was exaggerating the man’s kindness, morphing it into a fulfillment of his own twisted lust.

“Please don’t ask me to do readings at mass. I’m not good with public speaking,” he said, and they both laughed.

“Nothing like that, my dear--”

Will’s heart jumped again.

“I mean, my child,” the priest corrected himself, looking momentarily distracted by his lapse into a term of endearment. “I was thinking that you could help out at our weekly clothing drive. We also have a soup kitchen on Friday evenings. Feeding and clothing the hungry is certainly a direct way to save lives.”

“Yes, that would be great. I would love to help out,” Will said with what certainly felt like a big, goofy grin on his face.

“I will email you all of the relevant information, and see you on Friday, then. And Will, in the meantime, know that you will be in my prayers, close to my heart.”

“Aww, you look so cute like that,” Molly cooed when she came into their room that evening and found Will kneeling at the bedside, rosary beads draped between his fingers. His eyes were closed, his lips moving reverently over the prayers. “My good little Catholic boy.”

Will turned red and stopped short in the middle of an Our Father. Those words might never have quite the same meaning for him. If only he wanted to hear them in Molly’s voice more than Father Lecter’s...

Hannibal. Imagine if I could call him that, anytime I wanted. If I was that special. I could have him always. Hannibal’s voice, his hands, his lips...his body, if only I could...

It was going to be hard work, fighting these desires until he was pure again. Still, he centered himself in his resolve. Saying the joyful mysteries tonight had restored his faith in the future, especially because he had said his rosary in the manner which he thought Father Lecter would like best, knelt beside the bed, entirely open and devoted to the peace to be found in the rhythm of prayers, the wondrous stories of Christ’s miracles which filled his mind as he spoke the words.

How odd, to use the guidance of the person he was illicitly lusting after to help him cleanse himself of that very sin; yet it just might work. Already, there was no one whose advice he trusted more.

Lean on me, and I will not let you down, Father Lecter had told him.

“Molly, I was hoping we could talk,” he said, much more seriously than she seemed to expect based on her chirpy remark. He rose, crossed himself and then sat on the bed beside her as she put lotion on her hands. Her book already sat in her lap; she was going about her usual nightly routine without the slightest apparent idea of how much of a change he was undergoing before her very eyes.

All because of him.

It was a beautiful, bittersweet thought, its own form of devotion. He would never touch the object of his desire in a way that made manifest his burgeoning adoration, but he could use the priest’s wisdom to fuel his own metamorphosis, his becoming into a better man. That was tribute enough, surely, to repay Father Lecter for his great benevolence in guiding him.

“Sure, hon,” she yawned, “What’s up?”

“Well, I’ve been feeling really down lately, and I know that’s put some strain on our marriage. I was wondering if you think we would benefit by going to see a therapist together.”

Molly looked slightly afraid for a moment. Her eyes got big and she bit her lip, taken aback. "I mean, sure, if that's what you need. Sorry, that was silly." She laughed and gave him a hug. "Of course we can go and talk to someone together. I think it's a great idea. It just scared me at first for some reason, when you brought it up. I don't know why."

"Don't be scared," Will smiled into her shoulder, thinking of God's many blessings, one of them this chance for them to save this marriage before it dwindled into nothing more than an affectionate but platonic routine.

Part of him highly suspected Molly would be just fine with that routine. They almost never had sex anymore, and she had not once complained about it. When she was in the mood, she initiated it, and Will went along to please her, wishing he felt the same rapture in their physical joining that seemed to beam from her smile when it was over and she cuddled up to him, entirely content while he felt a million worlds away, floating in space treacherously close to despair in his confused loneliness.

He also theorized that Molly would rather let their relationship subside into friendship than lose him altogether. He didn't want her to have to choose; that just wasn't fair. He would choose: he would choose to renew his commitment to making this work, and to keep trying to focus his thoughts and feelings about the new priest only towards inspiring his own pious dedication to that goal. It was what Father Lecter would want, after all.

Molly smiled and nodded, accepting his reassurance, and he had a strange flutter of how it felt to be Father Lecter, the font of wise comfort. It felt like seeing into a killer's design, only this time, gaining a tiny hint of the inside of grace.

However, it would probably be very conducive to Will's latest plan for redemption if he could *stop thinking about Father Lecter for thirty seconds!*

"How was your day?" he asked Molly, sliding his glasses on and taking up his own book, settling into the domestic scene with new determination.

"Oh, it was alright. Wally forgot his lunch so I had to swing by school this afternoon, and you know what Linda the administrative aid told me? Mr. Henderson's gone missing! Crazy, huh?"

Will frowned. "You mean, that gym teacher who was verbally sparring with Father Lecter at the PTA meeting?"

So much for his brave plan to avoid the subject of this priest who already had the entire parish caught in a web of fascination.

"Yeah! He just up and left, I guess, without a trace. Friends think maybe he went hiking out at Ridge Park, and they're worried he might have run into coyotes. I really can't picture him being dumb enough to head up into the danger zones, though, I mean he's a peaked-in-high-school arrogant bully of a man, but he's not an idiot."

"Yes, he'd know better if he goes hiking there that often," Will noted. "And Coyotes wouldn't hurt him unprovoked, anyway.."

“Are you going to sit here and give me your ‘coyotes are just big dogs after all’ speech?” Molly smirked.

“Well, they are,” he laughed, “And I’m sure Henderson’s fine. Maybe he just got sick of the whole dispute over school funding and decided to start over somewhere new.” Whether or not this seemed especially likely, he reminded himself there were very good reasons why he no longer thought about potential cases and solving crimes. He had gotten into the habit of cutting off the old suspicious instincts at the pass when they threatened to re-emerge.

“My husband, the eternal optimist.” Molly pecked his cheek and Will almost did a double-take at this hugely inaccurate description of him. “Maybe. Let’s keep him in our prayers just the same, though.”

“Of course,” he smiled, rolling over on his side to go to sleep, adding a few last prayers to guide him into slumber’s embrace, first for the missing teacher, and then for Molly, Walter, the dogs, continuing on to list everyone he knew...smiling irrationally at the chance to add a brief prayer for Father Lecter. It was a deeply intimate thing to do somehow, but safe, a secret in his heart, between him and God.

He had done the ritual that followed since he was a boy, replaced his parents’ missing affection with *Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep / If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take...*

That night he did not dream, and considered it a welcome gift from God.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: it's time to get a peek into the POV of our very holy, innocent and pious Father Lecter 😊🏰🙏

(👹)

I'm hellbent, the reckless one

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Under ordinary circumstances, Father Hannibal Lecter would have found himself quite fond of this new parish. His responsibilities, from daily mass and confession to organizing help for the poor and visiting those who were ill, were easy enough to complete within the course of the day, as it was a small town and his congregants were few in number.

This also allowed him to focus more of his energy on each individual soul under his supervision.

The one and only reason why Hannibal had become a priest was to do his part to defile God's intentions for the world. He had dedicated his life to corrupting as many souls as he possibly could from within his guise of a loving and gentle-hearted priest. Far from the lamb of God, he was the tool of Satan, relishing the act of twisting consciences with his wicked, brilliant manipulations.

This was the pursuit which he considered his motivation in life, the passionate ambition that fueled his work.

As for his leisure-time activities, he also enjoyed breaking the commandments as thoroughly as possible for his own pleasure. Many times, he was able to combine work and play, engaging in affairs to lure previously innocent parishioners from their faithful spouses. He liked these schemes and their accompanying trysts well enough, for the simple pleasures that they were; hedonism was an ever-fruitful source of malevolent recreation. His emotions were never involved outside of a satisfaction in taking another zealous soul from the Lord and making sure they would burn in hell for all eternity after their demise...and of course, the light amusement of imposing his superior will on an often ignorant population who were, by and large, as malleable as clay.

His sexual exploits normally carried the same level of entertainment he derived from nurturing the half-buried sinful desires of the thieves and especially the killers.

If he had to choose the two commandments he loved to violate the most, it would have been easy to state them as "thou shalt not kill" and really to take one's pick of any of the myriad idiotic commands which forbade all forms of sex outside of that between a man and woman who were married to each other.

Wherever he went, he left a trail of dead bodies in his wake, but they were always very well hidden and he ate so much of the remains that there was never a shred of evidence to tie him to the crimes. As far as his own personal murders went, he considered his leisure time precious and well-earned enough to only kill those who struck him as horrendously discourteous. After rewarding them their just desserts, he would feast upon their meat, vastly contented in the station where he had placed himself, quite on a level with the Almighty, ruining His idealistic vision for humanity as often as he could.

Hannibal worked very hard, and he was good at what he did. He had been wandering the Earth for quite some time now, entirely untethered to anything but the whim of the moment and however he might twist it to his own amusement and advantage. There were few enough Catholic priests in America these days that it was no surprise he had already been transferred three times since arriving in the Northeast. The life of an unchained bachelor suited him very well, and the transfers worked nicely towards the various traps he set up never blowing up until after his departure. His victims, whether of fleshly sins or other varieties, were not given to suspect their dear, wise priest of contorting their pure hearts to evil. It was all absolutely delicious. What more could he possibly want from life?

But things were *not* normal in this parish, nor ordinary, and he was decidedly concerned to notice the stirring of new feelings in his heart. Although he had a firm hand always in the lives of his parishioners and was so accustomed to being well-loved that his ego seemed indestructibly secure by now, Hannibal never had favorites. He treated them all with the same amount of careful attention, organizing their damnation with the identical amount of merry aplomb. At night he would savor his taboo cuisine and wash it down with the finest wine, secure within his defenses against deeper emotion, against vulnerability most of all.

And yet -- against everything! Everything he knew about himself, had always *known*, it had finally happened, that which he had considered impossible, *thankfully* impossible.

Here he was, pacing his humble rectory, his dinner barely touched, wine glass but half-drained, despite the fact that he had prepared a scrumptious cassoulet of his latest victim, that intolerably rude gym teacher from the school, where he was now a partial administrator. Here he was, his heart pounding with so much deplorable agitation he was momentarily tempted to tear at his hair or wring his hands. This would not do, it would not stand. He would fight it.

Will Graham was his favorite.

He had known the man for a mere three weeks, but truly, *madly*, there could be no doubt about it. He had even taken to finding the most insubstantial excuses to request Will's help around the parish, anything he could possibly contrive, simultaneously appalled by the helpless urge and desperate to think of the next reason he could have Will close by.

Hannibal laid his hands on the chair back with a hard twist on the worn wood, deciding he would play back the events of the last week in his mind until they made sense and he had devised a plan to cut these feelings from his heart like the unwanted impediment to his sense of security that they obviously were.

When he first glimpsed the sweet, tormented face through the confessional partition, and when that voice first pierced his soul, he thought he must be imagining things. There was no particular reason why his heart should keen, nor his breath quicken in response to such quick, undefined impressions of a stranger.

Yet when he saw Will at the party that evening, he could not hold back the smile from his face. He had *not* imagined it after all, the arresting blue eyes like dazzling sapphires, the lush lips, the swirling brunette curls, the startling *beauty* which surpassed anything his eyes had beheld, in his many years as an enthusiastic patron of the arts. There were no paintings, no arias, nothing to express such loveliness. Will's body was equally compelling, shaped to draw

his eye and drive his libido to wildness as surely as if the Almighty had created this man to finally defeat him.

It only took one look for Hannibal to see in this young man a struggle that struck his heart straight through like a vicious knife. Like Hannibal, Will craved the pleasure of the hunt, needed it. But Will fought against everything remarkable and brilliant inside himself; he whipped himself raw with confused self-hatred over the same qualities that made Hannibal think he was incomparably gorgeous, seductive, irresistible, a force to be feared and loved. Worst of all, endearing, irreparably endearing.

He had found someone to watch over, one of his flock he wanted to lavish in affectionate guidance and true caring, instead of toying with for his own selfish entertainment.

Hannibal was afraid to fall in love, and Will Graham was afraid of himself. It was clearly a highly combustible situation. He should make some excuse to the Bishop to abandon this place, go somewhere safe from such perils.

Slamming his fist down on the chair, he scowled, to think of himself in actual *peril*.

He downed the rest of the wine in his glass with two long, smooth gulps, but his nerves were not steadied by the slight buzz of alcohol; his rebellious emotions felt heightened even more. For some confounding reason that made him curse God anew, he could not resign himself to the idea of leaving Will at the apex of his crisis after promising to be there for him.

He could not bear the thought of never seeing Will again.

Hannibal hooked a thumb into his Roman collar and ripped it off, then flung it to the wall in consternation. This was beneath him; this was *weak*.

He could never be weak again, not after Mischa (and why, he often wondered, were there no commandments designed specifically to protect children? Yet more proof of a cruel, laughing God whom he despised). So he concocted a new scheme designed to help him get rid of these inconvenient feelings currently running the gamut of compassion, sexual desire, intellectual and spiritual connection, all ramping so fearfully up towards *love* as to be absolutely nauseating. Especially offensive was his jealousy whenever Will spoke of his wife, looking so guilt-racked out of fondness and commitment to that harpy. He wanted to rip her to shreds, but to lose control in that way would be a betrayal of his most integral code of conduct. He killed to punish the rude, not to satiate his own frail human *jealousy*, of all things.

The best course of action was to get Will Graham out of his system. Seduce him, wreck his marriage, make sure he gave into every last naughty, dark, murderous urge, then leave him in the dust. Treat Will like he was just another mark, another future victim in his ongoing campaign to defy God.

How difficult could that really be?

It was difficult.

Will arrived for his soup kitchen duties on Friday night with his face lit up, excited to tell his priest about the progress he had made towards saving his marriage.

Obviously, it had been far too soon for Hannibal to outright suggest Will should leave Molly, but neither could he have his would-be lover burrowing further into the doomed union with someone incapable of understanding him, someone despicably *common*.

(Under pain of death, Hannibal would never have admitted to himself that he noticed Molly was attractive, smart and capable, and that it was understandable why Will would have wanted to marry her)

He was absolutely steaming on the inside, longing to back Will against the nearest wall and kiss him senseless, dying to go find this ridiculous, imposing “Molly” and make her pay for the jealousy currently eating him alive from within, like hellfire.

Instead, he smiled calmly, eyes flashing silent grievances. “My child, I am so glad to hear you have found some relief from your suffering.”

They spent the evening serving soup and bread to those in need, and when the church hall was vacant of diners and the other volunteers, Will and Hannibal sat down to enjoy leftover servings of the beef stew and buttermilk biscuits which the priest had prepared for the occasion.

“God, this is amazing,” Will marveled, “Completely delicious -- oh, no, did I just swear again in front of you?” He winced. “Sorry.”

“No apology needed.” Hannibal wondered to himself how it was that anyone could look that transcendently handsome wearing rumpled flannel and faded blue jeans.

“It’s just, for some reason I can’t seem to stop getting a little...overwhelmed when I’m with you,” Will mused.

Hannibal pretended his heart did not grow two sizes at this declaration. “Oh?”

“Yes, and then I just start blurting things without thinking about them first.”

“Perhaps it is merely that you are coming to trust in me as your pastor and confidant.”

Hannibal patted Will’s hand and thought how lovely he would look tied to his bedposts.

“That is a very good thing, Will. You have my permission to blurt things out as they occur to you, whenever you like.”

“Can I tell you about therapy? The couples therapy with Molly?” Will’s face fell slightly.

Excellent! Perhaps it did not go so well after all.

“Of course, Will. I am all ears.”

Will smiled, encouraged to share more. “Well, I feel so much better when I’m honest with Molly. So relieved that I finally told her I’m having doubts about our relationship. I was able

to do that much at our counseling session, but then, when it came to explaining why, I kept freezing up.”

Hannibal continued eating his stew, receptive but in no way showing how invested he was in the conversation. “Why do you think that is?”

“The problem is that I can’t connect to Molly; I’m afraid that at our root we might be incompatible, and it was selfish of me to marry her in some flailing attempt to make myself into a good person. If I told her about the...well, you know, the *nightmares* and why I really left my old job, I know how scary it sounds, what a monster I am. So when it comes to explaining what the problem is, I just don’t know what to say.” Will sighed and sat back, rubbing his hand across his brow. “If I end things, I’ll break her heart. If I give her the chance to know the real me, she’ll definitely *want* a divorce, but she’ll be even more broken-hearted. She’ll be afraid of me.”

“You cannot know that.” Hannibal was quite smug. He had been hoping they would come to this impasse. “But in the meantime, why not let the therapist guide you in this endeavor, and let go of your reservations. Do not decide there is no other solution until you have seen this through.”

It was a necessary component of the seduction, that he must himself maintain every appearance of being an upright and supportive man; therefore he was in the unfortunate position of having to make himself pretend to “care” about this wretched marriage. Luckily, this stage in the game was finite and Will’s relationship was bound to snap under natural strain even without his help.

Will shot Hannibal an intrigued look right then, as if he picked up on the boredom and reluctance in Hannibal’s tone which the priest had tried so hard to keep hidden. And instead of withdrawing his gaze and saying something cold, as he should, to curtail Will’s quick intellect from seeing through his disguise, he cracked for a moment.

He simply stayed right there for a few seconds and gazed at Will with his true besotted feelings.

Will blushed and made some excuse to go start cleaning up. He practically snatched up his own tray of food and fled the scene as he had left the confessional that first morning, and likely for the same reason, that Hannibal’s presence overwhelmed him.

Hannibal almost thanked God that the feeling just might be mutual, before he reminded himself who the enemy was.

The bi-monthly dance at the church hall came as a surprise to Hannibal when he was first notified of it by his dull but generally proficient secretary, Jeanette. It seemed he must put together a small committee to organize food, drink and decorations. The music was already scheduled, as they always had the same band to play at the event, within a genre which he was somewhat loath to hear was “Country Western.”

The looming catastrophe of cowboy hats and boots, steel guitars, “fiddles” and plaid kerchiefs would have provided little more than passing annoyance from Hannibal, if it were not for the incident which occurred on the same day that Jeanette informed him of the upcoming dance.

While filling his car with gas at the local station, Hannibal happened to look across the street to a quaint ice cream stand, which he had previously noticed was often crowded at this time of the early evening. The after dinner ice cream cone regulars were milling around, socializing and enjoying their dessert, and it could not have formed a more boring, typical small town scene, the stuff of 1950’s cinema and forced old-time Americana idealism.

However, in amongst the crowd of fools and pigs, his eyes immediately darted to the one exception: Will Graham, strolling beside his wife as they held their ice cream cones. They were smiling, laughing, her arm looped through his -- Hannibal gritted his teeth and jammed the gas pump back into the holder. His cheeks grew warm as storm clouds crowded his brain, making him feel like some idiotic exemplar of an infatuated, jealous cartoon character.

Worse still, they next shared a taste of each other’s ice cream, and the sight of this caused countless visions of how he would murder Molly Graham to cascade through Hannibal’s mind in an insufficient attempt at self-soothing. How could Will look at her like that, so lively and relaxed, with her *hands* all over his arms, his beautiful biceps left half-bare by the dark blue t-shirt that brought out his eyes so magnificently, how could she be the recipient of his bright smile and doubtless sweet words of renewed commitment --

Did he mean it? Was Hannibal nothing more to Will than a helpful counselor?

Was his evil scheme of seduction really defeated with such unheard-of ease? And how, among all of these upsetting problems, had Hannibal managed to feel that the only thing he had truly defeated was *himself*, by getting into this situation in the first place?

There was only one solution of which he could readily conceive.

“Hello?” Molly asked so casually when she answered the phone later that evening in their home.

“Hello, Molly, it’s Father Lecter.” He sucked the venom out of his tone with expert deceit, replacing it with smooth warmth. “How are you and Will doing this evening?”

“Oh, we’re great, thanks,” she chirped. “What can I do for you, Father?”

“Wondered if I might have a quick word with your husband. It’s about a volunteering opportunity at the church.”

“Hmm. Okay, just hold on a minute.”

He heard the phone being placed down on what he pictured as a kitchen counter.

“*Hmm*,” Really? This woman had a nerve. At times, it was hard not to respect that about her. She was nothing if not a formidable adversary.

“Honey?” he heard Molly calling. He was going to wring her neck -- no, dismember her while she was conscious and helpless -- no,

“Huh?” said an adorably distracted voice as a door closed near the phone. The sound of barking dogs followed, and Will laughing as he quieted them. More muffled conversation, as if Molly had covered the receiver.

Then, *finally*, that intoxicating voice spoke to him. Hannibal loved the slightly hidden Southern lilt beneath the surface of Will’s words; it was like a wonderful, sensuous treasure.

“Hey, Father, how’s it going?” Will asked.

“It’s going splendidly, Will,” he lied through his teeth. “Tell me, do you happen to have tomorrow afternoon free?” With a small chuckle, he elaborated, “I’ve just had a ‘country dance’ dropped in my lap which is apparently occurring this weekend. As such, I’m organizing a group to come to the church hall and help prepare it for this highly dubious sounding event.”

Will laughed, the sound so lovely and free. A laugh for Hannibal only. He needed to believe he did not laugh the same way with Molly.

“You know, I could practically hear the air quotes in your voice when you said ‘country dance,’” Will pointed out. “You uh, do realize there’s gonna be square dancing, right?”

A long pause was followed by Hannibal asking bluntly, “*What?*”

“Decorate it real pretty for us,” Molly had said in wishing Will goodbye when he left to go to the church hall on Saturday afternoon.

Maybe he should have made a cute joke back, a “*You bet, pardner,*” etc., but after three therapy sessions in which he couldn’t bring his deepest truth to the surface and *felt* the frustration which she on her part refused to express, he was tired.

After several date nights where he felt the same struggle between how he wanted to feel, how he made himself try to act on the surface, the happy spouse, and how he felt underneath, afraid of how unhappy he was, well. He was exhausted.

Will was trying, but it wasn’t working, and Molly knew it but she seemed to be doing everything in her power to avoid either of them directly addressing the fact. They could labor on like this for years, never getting anywhere but more lost. He wanted better for both of them, but it was too soon to give up, wasn’t it?

That didn’t make carrying on with his heart in the right place any easier.

Thoughts of Father Lecter still intruded on a daily basis, carrying him away against his will to a dreamland where they were both single and no one would be hurt by them being together, not Molly (who, in this fantasy, was happily married to someone else who could give her what she needed), and not God (who couldn’t keep *Hannibal* anymore, had no claim

on Will's lover in this dream). He saw them dating, talking of life, death, love, art, and philosophy, eating at nice restaurants and slow dancing in a shadowy bar (that was a funny dream; Father Lecter seemed too sophisticated for such a location, but it didn't make the vision of it any less lovely). Adopting a new puppy together, moving to a huge beach house on the coast and taking long walks by the ocean every night, hand in hand.

Having an overactive imagination was a dangerous attribute when you sprinkled in your subconscious insisting that you were falling for the last person in the world you should possibly be falling for.

When he got to the church hall, Father Lecter was standing on a chair, hanging a large, hokey banner which was emblazoned with stars, stripes and cowboy hats. In a more casual version of his attire due to the work of the day, the priest wore his black pants with a plain white t-shirt that clung admirably to his gorgeous frame. Will tried not to stare.

"I think they've been using that same banner since the '90's," Will chuckled.

"I can certainly believe it." The priest hopped down with his usual, distracting alacrity. He smiled, sunny and delighted. "I'm so glad you're here, Will. Jeanette and her sister are currently en route to collect the evening's food supplies, while the... 'band' is due to arrive by seven."

"I can, uh, hear the air-quotes again," Will joked.

"Well, rest assured, I'm a reasonably adept dancer, and I can usually adapt myself to any situation, regardless of my personal preferences in the areas of musical genre and the presence of 'twang.'" Hannibal gave Will a knowing look that was way too sexy and added, "I expect to be able to survive the event, especially with your help."

Will needed to metabolize the amount of attention he was currently getting, or he was going to melt into an unfortunately infatuated puddle on the floor. Blushing slightly, he pointed to the stack of tables and chairs in the back corner of the hall.

"Can I help you set those up? I remember how they usually do it."

"Of course, Will, thank you so very much." Hannibal broke off his gaze, and Will felt the deprivation like suddenly being plunged into ice water in the dark.

You're here to show appreciation because he helped you. You're here to be a good parishioner. Stop almost giving into these feelings!

They arranged the long buffet table on one wall, then placed folding chairs and card tables in a circle around the periphery of the room to keep the dancefloor free. As Father Lecter lifted the next chair from the pile, Will noticed his shirt rise up to reveal a series of lacerations on the golden-tanned skin of his back.

He sucked in a breath and went to the priest in concern. "Father," he sighed before he had even realized what he was doing. The priest had stopped, after placing the chair in the row,

and Will had reached out to place one hand under his shirt, touching the nasty-looking red scrape. The lacerations were thick and deep, and seemed recent.

“I’m quite alright, Will,” Father Lecter said with a smile, but the smile was so sad.

“Did you do this to yourself?” Will asked, stroking the cut mark as the older man shivered, then melted into his touch, his eyelashes fluttering.

Father Lecter pressed his lips together as if to hold back a moan. He nodded. “Self-flagellation has its roots in the most ancient forms of worship. It is a way to offer up one’s suffering to the Lord and be cleansed of sin. As a devotional practice, it has always brought me great comfort.”

“Are you suffering, Father?” Will frowned, lost in a barely suppressed fervor of admiration and longing, all mixed up with his desire to soothe the terrible-looking wounds, as new followers had come to Christ’s aid on his long walk to the crucifixion. He wished he could take the cross from Father Lecter’s shoulders, whatever it was.

“Not now.” Father Lecter gave him a look that was simultaneously reproofing and filled with yearning, strong enough that Will’s insecurities could not dissuade him from seeing it. “Will, I think you’d better stop that.”

“You’re right,” Will nodded, pulling his hand away, ashamed and bitterly regretting the necessity all at once.

They worked in silence for another half hour until the room was fully decorated with cardboard cutouts of haystacks and studded cowboy boots, the red gingham table-cloth, plates, napkins and silverware all neatly set out.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to wear one of these,” Will joked weakly, placing a big plastic bowl of costume bolo ties on the table.

As if grateful for Will breaking the tension with humor, Father Lecter chortled. “I’m only grateful that my Roman collar saves me from having to dress the part for such an occasion. My usual attire may be repetitive and dull, but it does save me from some sartorial nightmares.”

“Yeah, well, it looks great on you.” Will had blurted again, dammit. He ruffled his hair and backed away from the priest, as if putting space between them would blunt the edges of his too-daring words. “You could never be dull.”

“Thank you, Will; I’m in good company, then. You are the furthest from dull out of anyone I’ve met since arriving here.” Father Lecter paid unusually close attention to properly fanning the gold-fringed border around the stage, as if measuring his words. “So you and Molly will be attending tonight?”

“Yes, I promised her we would,” Will explained, wanting to kick himself a second later when Father Lecter looked as if he’d been kicked. “I mean! I promised her last month,” *before I met you*, “because we hardly ever come to these and she thinks they’re fun.”

“Maybe this one will be,” said Father Lecter, recovering smoothly from the way his face had briefly fallen. He winked at Will and they both let out nervous laughs.

“You all did an amazing job in here,” Molly marveled as they stepped into the church hall that night.

“Thanks, well, we had a lot of help,” Will lied, not meaning to lie, but finding for what seemed like the hundredth time that he was really damn good at it.

The place was already filled with cheerful parishioners all dressed up in the kind of merry Western attire which would certainly be classified by their priest as a “sartorial nightmare.” The jeans and plaid were as plentiful as the cowboy hats and boots, and people were already lining up in their proper formations for the square dancing as the band announcer adjusted the microphone with a loud squeal of feedback, “Well, good evening, y’all!”

“I’m going to get something to eat before unleashing my dance skills on this place,” Molly grinned, and as they filled their plates with hot dogs, beans and other theme-appropriate fare, Will caught sight of Father Lecter standing at the other end of the buffet line, deep in conversation with Walter’s best friend Miles.

The boy looked slightly stressed, as if he was confiding in the priest, who nodded while listening carefully to his ongoing explanation.

“Can you get us some drinks, honey?” Molly asked, more interested in watching the dancing as she turned to carry their plates to one of the dining tables. With her blue eyes following the jaunty movements on the dance floor, she hadn’t noticed Father Lecter, and it occurred to Will that most people didn’t obsessively search the priest out as soon as they entered any room he might be in.

“Sure, I’ll be right there,” he promised.

While filling two cups with fruit punch from the large bowl at the end of the table, he was conveniently located to listen in on the conversation between Father Lecter and Miles.

“...but Father, I like her so much, and it’s as if she doesn’t even know I’m alive. I spend all of French class staring at her, and I’m going to get an F at this point if I don’t cut it out.” Miles looked despondent, and actually, Will could relate.

Father Lecter had noticed Will’s proximity and took a moment to greet him silently with a warm glance and a smile. Turning back to Miles, he suggested, “I really think you had better turn your mind back to your studies, Miles, or the consequences will be dire. And after all, there are certain advantages to paying attention in French class. You might pick up some wonderful romantic phrases which could be used later, at a more appropriate time when you meet someone who is just as interested in you as you are in them.”

“I really don’t think any girl is gonna be impressed by me spouting a bunch of French at them, Father.” Miles was highly dubious.

“Don’t be so sure,” said the priest playfully. He wasn’t looking at Miles when he continued speaking, though; he looked right into Will’s eyes.

“Tes yeux, j’en rêve jour et nuit,” he said huskily, “Je ne peux pas vivre sans toi.”

His throat throbbed beneath his stiff priestly collar; his brown eyes glistened. Will’s palms grew so sweaty he almost lost his grip on the red solo cups of glorified sugar water. Everything else about this night was so fake, such manufactured, plastic ideas of revelry, but Father Lecter -- *Hannibal* -- was so achingly real. His voice caressed the words in French with a perfect accent, the syllables flowing like crystal clear brook water over Will.

Finally, Father Lecter faced Miles again with a broad smile. “Come now, don’t you think something like that might come in handy?”

“If I could ever say it that well,” Miles admitted ruefully. “Guess I’d better start paying more attention to Madame and less to Michelle.”

“A sterling idea,” Father Lecter approved. “But the night is not over yet. I believe that young lady over there is trying to obtain your attention.”

Miles glanced over to the table where Walter had settled. A girl from their class was there, too, smiling and waving at Miles. His face lit up and he waved back. “Thanks, Father, you’re the best.”

“How many languages do you *speak*?” Will asked, lingering near the priest’s tempting orbit.

“A few,” Father Lecter said with dismissive seeming-humility. But Will knew perfectly well the priest was quite proud of himself for his various talents.

To Will, the older man’s ego was as charismatic as it was cute, although he could only imagine, with fondness, how irritating it might be at times if one spent long amounts of time with him. Before he could start fantasizing about them bickering as a couple, he made himself awkwardly nod and go find Molly.

“Damn, look at him go,” Molly’s friend Wren whistled as Father Lecter continued dancing among the parishioners with so much confident talent that anyone would think he’d been frequenting Country-Western clubs for years.

With a broad smile and easy-flowing movements, the priest actually made the same form of dancing he had previously mocked look *good*.

Furthermore, nearly every single woman and a few of the men sitting around the table watching the dancers was practically drooling over Father Lecter. And they continued regaling each other with comments on how the new priest was “gorgeous,” “so freaking handsome,” “one heck of a dancer,” “‘Father?’ or ‘Daddy?’” until Will was just about ready to explode with bottled up jealousy and frustration. He didn’t want anyone else looking at the priest with desire, but...of course they were! Anyone would. Anyone.

Will could be anyone. He was not special.

And worse yet, he had allowed his feelings to carry him away until he was tuned out from what Molly was saying. To save face, he turned to her and said with a forced smile, “Sure!”

Unfortunately, he hadn’t a clue what she had said just before that; his doomed “Sure!” was merely a symptom of totally baffled panic. Before he knew it, it became clear that she had asked him to dance, and then they were on the floor, dosi do-ing and swinging around, and what the hell was he doing? He’d managed to avoid the actual square dancing at the previous church events, and this...this had to be some new, previously unimaginable form of public humiliation. Will was a fine dancer if he just stuck with middle school style slow dancing, but this...he focused on not tripping and did *not* look at Father Lecter, because that would probably make him fall flat on his face.

The music wasn’t his style, wasn’t mellow like the low volume classic rock Will typically kept as background noise in his car, or out on boats with his same old boom box from college. The down-home hokum of it had an undeniable charm to it though, bringing back memories of his boyhood in the south. Soon he had managed to smile and submit to the simple-to-follow steps, especially since Molly was clearly having fun.

“I’m beat,” she announced, patting his shoulder after three dances.

Will nodded, fully intending to follow her back to the table for a well-earned reprieve from “Roll Away to Half-Sashay” and “Promenade.” However, at the same moment, Jeanette -- who had been dancing with Father Lecter -- came up to him looking similarly exhausted.

“He’s worn me out, can’t keep up with him another minute,” she laughed to Will. “Take him off my hands?”

Will turned red. Father Lecter took it in stride, though. He bowed slightly to Will like an old-fashioned gentleman and offered his hand. “Shall we?”

And that probably should have been okay, too -- Will and Father Lecter had crossed paths a bunch of times during the previous songs, due to the group choreography, but without making eye contact or touching. So this, now, was different. The priest’s hand was sweetly cool as ever, despite the heat of the exertion, as if dancing like he was a Texas native didn’t even make him break a sweat.

“So, you’re a ‘reasonably adept dancer’?” Will raised his eyebrows as they waited for the next song to start. The priest might not be winded, but he was breathing a little hard himself, maybe not just from all the fast dancing. “Thou shalt not lie, Father.”

An enigmatic shadow crossed the priest’s face as he replied matter-of-factly, “Let he who has not sinned throw the first stone.”

And then, the band for some inconceivable reason of wild angels, batshit crazy fate and destiny, or just plain bad luck, began to play a slow song, a gentle waltz.

“What were the chances?” Will mumbled, following along as Hannibal led him confidently through the waltz.

“What?” Hannibal asked, pretending he hadn’t heard the comment.

Will’s brow furrowed, and it was adorable. “Nothing.”

“You’re from Louisiana. Does this music bring back any memories?” Hannibal smiled, longing to hear about a younger Will, all of his innocent hopes and dreams. Absurdly fantasizing about making some of them come true, which...wasn’t cruel or manipulative of him at all. How strange.

“Mmm,” Will laughed quietly. “It sure does. I can even hear myself starting to sound like sixteen year old bayou boy me, the longer I’m in this environment. Pretty soon I’m liable to say ‘y’all.’”

“You won’t catch me complaining.”

Will looked up at him, unanswerable questions in his eyes, a shy smile playing about his plush, kissable lips.

Hannibal enjoyed the way the younger man was slightly shorter in stature, how well they fit together. He could imagine seeing the two of them dancing from an outsider’s perspective, and what an attractive couple they must make.

What a pleasure, at long last, to have those lovely long fingers draped over his own with such trust, to have Will’s other hand heavy on his shoulder, gripping slightly as if for stability. How delightful to guide Will through the steps so that the younger man started to calm down a bit from his originally flummoxed state. Hannibal loved the way Will looked tonight, cheeks pink from dancing and self-consciousness, curls twined so beautifully around his handsome face. He was dressed simply, in an ice blue shirt that made his eyes look stunning, and the best-looking pair of jeans in this room by what Hannibal might amusedly, but quite truthfully term “a country mile.”

Hannibal had not been this happy in weeks. Not since the last time they were alone together and Will was at his mercy, weak under his influence. Now, as they turned to the sentimental lyrics being belted out with reasonable skill by the singer on stage, Hannibal felt himself more than a little under *Will’s* power, and he did not hate the feeling as he might have expected. It was new, and deeply disconcerting, but there was pleasure in the pain of it.

It was entirely possible that his initial obsession was slowly growing into something much more serious. Never in a million years would Hannibal have guessed he might one day enjoy being under someone else’s influence after demanding on the upper hand for years. Could he have found a partner?

There were a few problems to surpass before reaching such questions, however. He caught sight of Molly watching them with what she might be feigning as nonchalant passing interest; the smile on her face was a little too tense and suspicious for his taste. He was not at all sure that a fight between husband and wife about him was really going to go in his favor at this

junction. In fact, his preference was for Will to break off the marriage and run to Hannibal's arms.

It struck him with the power of an electric shock that he wasn't looking for an affair, not anymore. He wanted to keep Will close for always.

Much more serious... to say the least. This changed everything.

Hannibal might not mind being changed...he might even crave it.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Will asked him softly.

The first waltz had shifted wistfully into another, and now the singer was warbling,

*"Let's fall to pieces together
Why should we both fall apart
Let's fall to pieces together
Right here in each other's arms..."*

A shiver of tenderness took Hannibal over down to his bones, spilling into his soul like liquid gold. His heart beat faster and he drew Will just ever so slightly closer, as close as could possibly be allowed without looking fully amorous.

"I'm thinking about you, Will."

For a moment, he allowed himself to tip his face down to brush against Will's curls. He inhaled the gingery scent of his shampoo and thought he would die if he couldn't clasp Will's beautiful face right there and kiss him, but he couldn't. And he didn't die, but the hurt of deprivation was almost as strong.

Will's hand tightened around his. "Father, there's something I think I ought to tell you."

"Anything. I'm always here to listen."

They both felt the wildly inappropriate irony of it. Hannibal's pious, priestly-duty words being spoken close to Will's ear in a throaty voice, the dazzling intimacy of the moment.

"You know...the person I was having unholy thoughts about, Father, um..." Will looked at him uncertainly, as if he expected the floor to fall out from under them. "It's a man."

"Will, please..." He licked his lips, stared at Will's, felt out of his depths.

Suddenly, Hannibal didn't know how to confront Will's openness; it almost frightened him. He did not want to listen to any confessions of Will's lustful fixation on him, not if it was only to lead into an affair.

Not if he was going to end up a one night mistake before Will ran back to Molly.

He had been that to plenty of people in the past and he never cared; in fact he was amused and then quickly forgot the meaningless trysts, but now...he could not stand the thought.

“You said I could tell you anything.” Will looked hurt, his face falling. Hannibal could have screamed.

“Will, do you think I am made of stone? Do you think I am so confident that I can handle anything that happens to me without ever feeling overpowered by it?”

“It’s really hard to imagine you being intimidated by anything, much less me,” Will said, “But I...I can feel it now, in your touch, the look on your face. You’re worried.”

Hannibal let go of Will and stepped back, although another slow song was beginning and Will seemed disappointed.

“Please don’t make the mistake of assuming this is easy for me.”

With that, Hannibal turned and left, went out to the parking lot in anticipation of a nice long solitary pacing session. Instead, his frustration was compounded when he encountered Molly Graham.

She was sitting on top of her car’s hood, a beer in one hand, her legs dangling casually in their cowgirl boots. Hannibal was momentarily taken aback by the fact that she was wearing Will’s coat over her purple dress, as if it was her way of clearly claiming her husband, reminding both of them to whom Will belonged.

“Know what, Father?” she said, apropos of nothing.

His only response was to mildly lift his brows, his hands hooked into his trouser pockets, his face restored to near-perfect calm, but only *near* perfect.

“I don’t like you.” She hopped down from the car, then brushed past him, passing him the beer. “I haven’t entirely decided why. I just...don’t.”

He said nothing; merely nodded, and she went back inside.

Hannibal finished the beer, standing alone in the moonlight, watching a new drift of flurries beginning to descend. He had much to consider.

The next move would doubtless be Will’s. And this man for whom he had fallen personified so many richly nuanced qualities, from brilliance to innocence, from sweetness to danger. But one quality Will lacked entirely was predictability.

For the first time in his life, Hannibal had absolutely no idea what was going to happen.

Chapter End Notes

The song they danced to is "Let's Fall to Pieces Together" by George Strait. I'm enjoying the unexpected trip down country music nostalgia lane which this fic is bringing in. 😊

And we'll be getting back to the things Hannibal said to Will in French, in Chapter 4. 😊

All my casualties of love

Chapter Notes

cw: mentions of homophobia

That night Molly caught Will perusing a French-to-English dictionary on his phone.

“Ooh-la-la,” she crooned amusedly, “What’re you looking at that for?”

“Nothing, just something Walter and Miles were talking about, one of their assignments for French class.” *Lies, lies, lies*. He was getting better at it, or was that worse?

“Kay,” she murmured sleepily, nestling into bed and closing her eyes.

He sat up beside her, his heart thundering as his fingers flew over the screen trying to find the correct spelling of the words Father Lecter had used when giving Miles flirtation advice. The words which *Hannibal* had said, looking at Will like he wanted to...God, Will didn’t even know what, but he wanted it, too.

It was wrong, and he was so beyond fucked up and out of control. But he *had* to know. Luckily, he remembered enough basic French from his days in New Orleans to have a pretty good idea of the phrases, even if he couldn’t piece them together without a little help.

Tes yeux, j'en rêve jour et nuit. I dream about your eyes day and night.

Oh, Jesus...Will slumped down in bed, staring at the phone screen. He heard the words again in Hannibal’s voice, and against his own ear with wet heat, *Je ne peux pas vivre sans toi. I can't live without you.*

God, God, God, Fuck, fuck, fuck.

He was horrible, he was going to Hell, he couldn’t fight this feeling if he tried. Before he knew what happened, he’d slipped into a hot shower, closed his eyes and got a hand around his aching cock, imagining it was Hannibal, imagining how he would tease the older man and make him crazy with dirty talk, *Please, bless me, Father*, and it was naughty, raunchy but so fucking sincere and *real*, this need that made him think these insane thoughts and touch himself...

With long, twisting strokes he took himself firmly towards an intense orgasm. He pulled gently down on his balls right before he came, which made it so much more, because he was visualizing that Hannibal, Father Lecter, God -- for some reason in Will’s fantasy the older man was a gay sex genius who knew every little secret way to make Will writhe in pleasure. Hannibal had magically intuited all those skills which Will had taught himself over his entire

career as a masturbator since adolescence, the tricks he used to get himself off while watching porn or, yes, fuck yes, thinking about killing...

And he moaned into his hand and bit it, licked it, picturing Hannibal's fingers touching, teasing and wrapped around him, stroking him base to tip, playing with his balls. He saw Hannibal pressing him against the wall of this very shower with Will's banal Old Spice body wash and grey washcloth on the ledge and fucking him so hard every bottle of soap fell to the floor with a loud crash. He felt Hannibal's cock pushing past his own eager lips and fucking into his mouth until the priest came right down his throat, telling Will he was a good boy, "*good boy*," calling him "*my child*" with a ragged gasp --

"Yes," Will whispered ecstatically, eyes squeezed shut seeing every moment of it, every sinful detail in full, blazing color and sound and he was coming so hard, spilling into his slick hand, shuddering, wishing he could be as loud as he wanted (loud enough for Hannibal to hear).

Then the guilt, like a hammer to his skull, the terrible shame as soon as the waves of pleasure subsided and he slid to the shower floor crying his eyes out. He could dream of being touched and kissed and loved to the utmost two people could share, dream of it with Hannibal but he would never feel it for real. That was a sadness all by itself, one he did not even deserve to feel but could not help. And the dream itself, while it tortured him with impossible wishes, was an unforgivable sin against Molly.

He put his face in his hands, sobbing as quietly as possible so as not to be caught, and by the time he was done crying his skin was red with the heat of the shower water, his lungs burning like he'd just run a marathon, his heart pounding against the walls of its cage, screaming to come out and be the animal. His conscience dragged him over the coals, reminding him he was a despicable person, a traitor, a cheater in heart if not in deed, and everything felt so terrifyingly out of control, he could not possibly imagine setting his world aright again, where to begin.

The only thing he knew for sure was that he needed to go to confession.

"I received your text," said Father Lecter curtly. He had emerged quietly from a nearby clearing in the woods to stand a few feet away from where Will was unpacking his fishing gear.

Since the time of their meeting, February had surrendered to March in a sudden spite of clear, sunny weather, almost as if the new month was rebelling against its predecessor, resentful even in victory. The unseasonable warmth could not last, but the waters had sprung back to life under it, replete with shiny trout as the sky filled with birds surprised to return so soon from their winter retreats to the south.

Animals knew, somehow, when change was coming. They smelled it in the air, felt it in their bones. Will could relate to that, even when he hated it in himself. The animal *always* knew, and they took what they wanted. All people could do was fumble around trying to prevent the inevitable within their own hearts and minds, *pretending* to be tame.

In the late morning sunshine, the river glistened, and Will wished he was a fish right then, able to swim so far away without having to *care* about anyone or anything ever again, except the simple forward momentum of freedom under cool, clear waters, coasting over smooth rocks.

But in fact he cared so fucking horribly, deeply about everything. It was like a gushing wound that never healed, just kept getting everyone else dirty. He cared about this mysterious, seductive priest, about Molly and Walter, and of course his dogs, longtime and unjudging companions, currently regarding the newcomer with interest. He wanted a life where those he loved were all happy and safe, and their meaning to his own existence made sense, didn't hurt any one of them. Why did it seem so impossible?

The dogs sniffed at the priest's outstretched hands, and then he bent to greet them, petting each of their heads in turn, remaining patient with their manner of sussing him out as friend or enemy. At last, they gave him a few approving yips, despite his lack of treats to offer them, and went back to wandering the river banks, frolicking together, well-trained not to leave Will's eyeshot.

Will watched all of this with careful interest, invisible clock hands ticking over his heart. Waiting for the pieces to fall together where they belonged so that he knew where to go or what to do. It seemed there was little chance of solving the riddle of his life if he didn't give destiny a few good shoves in his own chaotic style.

The only way he knew how to act was as himself; namely, a mess. Somehow, he intimated his mess was one the priest felt intrigued and even intoxicated by, or was that just a forbidden, wicked hope on his part? Still, his intuition, at least, had never led him wrong before. On his wedding day, his instinct had begged him not to go through with it, to run away despite all the reasons why common sense insisted that would be cruel and idiotic.

Now his intuition whispered of the stolen heat in every glance between himself and Father Lecter, and that he had the power to thaw this man's stubbornly protected heart from behind its wall of ice.

Setting himself free could set Hannibal free, too. A vigorously insistent, if wholly unforgivable theory. He could not let it go.

"You received my text?" He returned Father Lecter's cold veneer with easily defeating disapproval. "That's cute. I would never have known that if you hadn't shown up here today. Because I never got an answer to my text."

"Far be it for me to be rude," the priest retorted slyly. "I assumed my presence, when you beckoned me to arrive at this location at this time, would be answer enough."

He stood with his hands folded behind him, looking out of place in his immaculate clerical suit. His hair was slicked back neatly but shining in the warmly golden rays caressing over his high cheekbones, illuminating his endearingly crooked teeth as he bared them to speak. Like a sexy vampire hiding in the guise of a chaste nobleman. The thought made Will smother a chuckle. This man fooled everyone else so easily, but he was unprepared for the

way Will saw him in all his layers, sifting through each in turn searching for the meaning, the darkness hidden in the light.

Will felt the older man watching him intently as he baited his hook and then cast off. "I wanted to see you -- ahem, to talk."

He shot Father Lecter a coy, pointed look over his shoulder, then returned his eyes to the water, since he'd felt a tug on his line. The priest had only lifted his brows in silent, interested acknowledgement.

His voice going ever so slightly gritty to the exertion as he reeled in his catch, Will added, "Didn't want to have this conversation with other people around, and *definitely* wasn't about to have it in church."

"Whatever it is you wish to discuss, you have chosen to discuss it on your own territory."

Will smirked and gave him back some of his own suave attitude, plus some sass. "Quite."

He placed the wriggling fish in the ice-filled cooler he'd set in the grass nearby. As he looked up, he saw that the priest's eyes were beautiful in this hazy yellow sunglow; they shimmered as if the deep cinnamon faded to amber glass.

"And you described yourself to me as a 'pretty decent' fisherman," Father Lecter observed. There was a twist about his lips which suggested he used the term 'fisherman' in more ways than one. Apt enough. They spoke each other's language. "It would appear you are as disingenuously humble about your own talents as you accused me of being with regard to dancing."

"I'm great at fishing," Will admitted more honestly. "Not so great with, you know. Feelings. Or I'm good at feeling them, but fail to express them; they come out the wrong way, or at the worst times."

"You blurt."

"Only with you." Will kept his eyes trained on the task of baiting a new hook.

Will knew Father Lecter wasn't looking at him in that moment, anyway; he couldn't bring himself to.

"You never blurt." Will smiled, a little fondly and cast off again.

The wire flung through the air in a lovely arc, hook sinking into the water so quietly it was like it never even happened.

"My Dad never taught me to deal with my feelings. How to talk about them in a healthy way. He taught me to fix up boats, go fishing and keep my head down. Guess he sensed somehow that I was different, I'd need a lot of self control to pass as normal. Also guess he couldn't be bothered to do much more. We never really *talked* about it, of course, so I don't know for sure."

“You could always ask him.” Father Lecter gave him a discerning look.

“No, I don’t think so. Not sure I care anymore, about his reasons. There’s still a chance to figure out my own, though.”

Father Lecter had taken up a seat on a large, accommodating rock behind Will. He resembled a modern-day St. Francis, as the dogs had settled in for a rest and were laying around him in docile contentment. It was adorable, annoyingly so.

Will felt justified, in some weak vengeance against his soft feelings for the man, to launch the key question of the day at him with no warning: “Father, what exactly are your views on the Roman Catholic church’s stance against homosexuality?”

If the priest was startled, he hid the feeling quickly; only a small quiver of his lips and a fluster in his perfectly folded hands revealed any upset. “The church teaches us that while homosexual feelings are not a sin, to act on those feelings is a mortal violation of God’s commandments.”

“A subsection of ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery,’” Will put in.

“Yes. The church claims that sex was created by God to beget children and to further sanctify the holy bond of matrimony between man and woman. To engage in sex for any other reason is a gross distortion, a disrespect towards your own body, an objectification of something meant to be deeply revered.”

“How interesting. I knew all that.”

Will knew he would cut a non-threatening figure to most people, given that he was currently wearing waders over blue jeans and flannel, plus his hunting vest and a faded baseball cap emblazoned with the phrase “Fish Magnet.” But Father Lecter looked rather taken aback, all the same, *finally*.

Will smiled. “I asked you how *you* felt about it.”

The priest pursed his lips. “I don’t approve of the church’s law on this matter. I have advocated against the policy for years. It’s nothing more than disheartening homophobia, based on a few words from scripture which have been twisted from their original meaning.”

“You don’t think it’s wrong to act on gay feelings,” Will translated. Father Lecter nodded.

“Have *you* ever acted on gay feelings?” The younger man blurted, knowing he was playing with fire.

“Will.” A warning, sterner this time. “I have taken a vow of abstinence. I am not in the habit of discussing my desires, no matter to whom they refer.”

“You’re ducking the question -- you know what, don’t tell me. I really don’t want to know if this is typical for you, something you can treat lightly. It’s kind of a big deal for me, and...” Will tapered off, frustrated, his cheeks burning with indignation.

“You make a great assumption. Simply because someone has had previous experiences, that does not make a new experience with a different person less meaningful. There might be no point in comparing predecessors to someone so much more important.”

“*Predecessors*.” Will clucked his tongue, infuriated at how the priest kept tiptoeing around the topic, refusing to face it head on. He didn’t seem to care how much Will had at stake here; he was too busy protecting his own interests.

His jealousy had also flared at Father Lecter’s reference to “past experiences.” Perhaps this wasn’t Hannibal’s first illicit affair, but it was the burgeoning crisis about to throw Will’s carefully arranged life into disaster. The older man could at least *pretend* to care about that, if he cared about Will.

“You know why I’m fishing, right? I had to have an *excuse* to come out here today, something to tell Molly I was doing. It helps with the lying if there’s a truth too, something to cover it up.” Will frowned, reeling his line back without bothering to catch another fish. “I have to keep covering up how I’m feeling.”

“There’s nothing wrong with how you’re feeling, Will, except that you insist on using it to hurt yourself. Others around you will be injured by the blowback of your deception.”

“You want me to admit how I feel directly, to you and to Molly. You want me to say what I want.” Will glowered at him, without the defense of a fishing pole in his hand right now, or another task to occupy him. He whipped off his hat, stuffed it in his back pocket, and perched his hands on his hips.

Will Graham, in all his furious glory, made Hannibal get to his feet as well, meeting the confrontation with a fresh spark in his own eyes.

“You offer me none of your own truth but demand all of mine. I’m sick of this,” Will fumed.

“I see.” The priest clenched his jaw.

One of the dogs sensed Father Lecter’s dismay and nudged a sympathetic head against his leg. It was Will’s eldest pet, a pretty Husky-German Shepherd mix.

“She likes you,” Will smiled a little sadly. “That’s Olive. She’s getting on in years enough now she’s usually too tired to show that much attention.”

“Hello, Olive,” said the priest, stroking the still silky fur atop her head. “I’m sorry that you are finding our interactions tiresome, Will. Let me know if there is anything I can do to --”

“Yes, you can.” Will strode up to him and paused when they were close enough to touch. Of course, they didn’t; the notion of it simmered in the air between them. Olive backed up as if intimidated by the charged moment.

“You can flog me,” said Will.

Father Lecter opened his mouth, then closed it again. He lifted a finger as if to make an objection.

“It’s good enough for you, as a way to cleanse yourself of your worst sins, you told me so. I want you to show me. Is that too much to ask? I’m trying to find a way to put this behind us before it spirals out of control.”

“You trust me to get you back under your own control, because you have noticed yourself yielding with pleasure to my firm upper hand,” the priest assumed.

“Can you do us both a favor and not talk about pleasure like that?”

“Apologies. Will, flagellation is a deeply sacred form of punishment tied to a lifestyle of strict self-discipline. If this is what you desire, you must submit to it with an open heart, knowing you will suffer as Christ has done for you, and thereby purify your soul.”

Will wanted to know just exactly how hard and fast the priest’s heart was beating, how it would feel if he pressed his palm to the older man’s chest right then. He swallowed against the temptation.

“Don’t say ‘desire’ either, not if the only relief you have to offer me comes at the end of a switch or a whip.”

Father Lecter’s eyes narrowed. “I am not the one who is trying to save their marriage, Will. What do you expect me to think, when you raise such insinuations only to continue your crusade to recommit yourself to Molly? Do you think me eager to be your temporary mistake on this path to redemption?”

Will leaned in closer, murmuring near his ear as the priest’s cheeks flushed. “If you want me to stop making insinuations, maybe cut back on the romantic gestures, florid speeches to me in French, and consistently translating my religious devotion into sensuality with your comments about ‘pleasure’ and ‘desire.’”

Leaning back, Will raised his eyebrows as his pouty lips formed a cold, accusing smile.

Father Lecter’s infuriated, but still bottled-up expression seemed to say that Will had confirmed his worst assumption. “I will endeavor to maintain appropriate detachment.”

Will nodded. “I’d like to shake this all off as soon as possible. Is tonight acceptable to you, to begin our lesson in self-discipline?”

“Certainly. See if you can summon back your respect for me as your pastor in the meantime.” Father Lecter was livid. Will thought he looked more in the mood to spank him than to offer an old-fashioned back flogging, and to his own consternation he was highly intrigued at the unspoken prospect.

“I guess we’ll see about that,” he snapped, refusing to show weakness.

The priest didn’t meet his eyes again; he walked away, cutting a quick path through the woods as if he could not wait to get away from Will.

Hannibal locked the church up once Will had entered it that evening. Privacy would be vital for this exercise. He had prepared the altar for his favorite congregant's arrival, placing the kneeler usually reserved for weddings in the center right below the crucifix.

Will gulped, looking more than a little nervous, and Hannibal drank in the younger man's fear like a sweet, rich wine. Those blue eyes seemed so innocent again, although they had burned with such anger and lusty need during their meeting at the river. Will's attention flitted from the dead-set look on Hannibal's stern face to the selection of whipping tools laid out on the altar table. He set his jacket down in a pew and greeted Hannibal with an awkwardness the priest found charming, "Hey. Guess I should take off my shirt?"

The candles on the altar blinked at Will in narrow points of flame, and the scent of his favorite incense was heavy on the air. Hannibal nodded. "Good evening, my child. Yes, please take your shirt off and kneel here beside me."

In his all-black attire, sans Roman collar, Hannibal knew he looked imposing. His broad shoulders and puffed out chest spoke of his unflappable confidence. He was resolved to get through this night without losing composure again. The task was nothing if not an obvious challenge for both of them, that Hannibal endure it without crumbling to sentiment or tenderness; that Will endure enough to erase his illicit desire by way of holy pain and the grace it would imbue.

In his heart, Hannibal desperately wanted to know which outcome Will truly wanted, and if Will had even been honest with himself about that answer. He refused to show vulnerability when he had been offered none in return. It would please him to make this boy whimper and plead with him as he bestowed structured, careful discipline befitting his sins. It would give Hannibal back some of his much-pined-for power, at last.

Will opened his shirt, revealing more and more of his stunning body to Hannibal's inevitably hungry, dark eyes. Then he knelt down obediently and folded his hands in a praying stance, making eye contact with Jesus on the cross above him. "I want you to use the same flogger that you use for yourself."

Hannibal frowned, collecting his thoughts which had tried hard to run into riotous yearning at the sight of Will's beautiful body, his bare chest and rosy-pink nipples, firm arms and fine back, every inch of him perfect. Thank the Evil One he would have the privilege of marking that lovely flesh, even if he could not scar it as his own, the way he most craved to do. Once again, he only arrived at this thought by making himself disregard the strange desire to thank *God*. How ludicrous.

God had nothing to do with this, except in Hannibal's mockery of Him.

"The whips I use for myself are harsh, Will. I have accustomed myself to their bite through years of build-up and experience. For your first time, I had planned to use this one."

Hannibal showed Will a black leather flogger, and the younger man softly snorted his disapproval. "That looks like something you got from a sex shop so you would have something that wouldn't hurt me too much."

“I...” Hannibal wanted to scowl, but maintained his poker face under great duress. Did Will Graham have him under surveillance? “I did no such ridiculous thing. And you might be surprised at how sharp a wound this simple implement can inflict.”

“Well, no thank you, all the same. I’ll take the one you use for yourself, please.”

Impossible man. Hannibal nodded stonily. “Very well.”

He picked up the rope flogger with its knotted tassels, the one that had left deep lacerations on his own skin. There was such a raw intimacy in sharing this with the man he loved. And he did love Will, to distraction. Finally he admitted it, if only to himself, and only with raging discomfort. He loved him even though the real reason he flogged himself was to try and make the weak, upsetting devotion for Will go away. To punish himself for letting someone so far into his heart. Yet all he came away with was a sense of pride that he had marked himself in Will’s name, given Will his most delirious pain, offered his worship.

“You’re to confess your sins, my child,” he ordered. “One at a time. For each sin that you tell me, I will administer an appropriate number of blows. If you need me to stop at any time, you’re to use the word *Mercy* to let me know.”

“I won’t need--”

Hannibal shook his head. “Our Lord has plentiful mercy to offer, Will. You will take it if you need to. Tell me ‘yes’ or I won’t go through with it.”

“Yes,” Will nodded, “If I need you to stop, I’ll say so.”

“Brave boy.” Hannibal stood behind him and pressed his hand against the warm, smooth flesh he was about to torment. Will shivered at his touch.

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” he began, keeping his voice even and calm although Hannibal knew his fear had to be rising at the impending ordeal. “It has been one week since my last confession, and these are my sins. I have taken the Lord’s name in vain on fifteen occasions.”

Hannibal bore down with the flogger, striking Will’s back across the shoulder blade with quick, ruthless force.

The sound Will let out was gorgeous, a high, keening cry of irresistible surprise at the strength of the pain. Hannibal tightened his grip on the flogger. A thin sheen of sweat dotted his face, gathering over his brow and on his upper lip. Heat swept over his body, gathering in sweetness at his groin, and he knew it would take all his strength not to surrender, strip Will entirely and fuck him right there on the altar, see what noises this brought out of the naughty, demanding boy.

“Next?” Hannibal prompted, breathing too heavily.

“I’ve lied to my wife by omission. I’m frustrated with our therapy.” Will wiped his own damp brow across his folded arms and seemed to be readying himself for the next blow. He was so

very strong and courageous, but he trembled slightly all the same. "I don't really want to save our marriage, but I don't want to hurt her either. I should tell her the truth, but I don't because I'm too afraid."

"You lack the faith in God which should tell you not to fear. That the Almighty has your destiny planned, and you must follow the commandments to remain on the just path. Brace yourself, Will."

Will loosed a breathy sigh, then Hannibal whipped him again, leaving another set of long scratches on his back, mirroring the wound on his opposite shoulder blade like angel's wings, the red marks already looking angry and sore. With a moan, the boy on the altar gripped the upper ledge of the kneeler, where one would typically keep their hands folded in prayer, or carefully study their bible laid out before them.

He spoke his next sin quickly, as if he could hardly wait for the next strike. "I've had impure thoughts of someone I think I'm falling in love with. I want him so badly. I masturbated, imagining him making love to me. I could almost feel him inside me while I touched myself, Father."

Will's eyelashes fluttered and he licked his lips. Hannibal, despite being the dominant party in this arrangement, had the distinct feeling he was being flirted with, at this of all times, and an electric shock of lustful fury took him over, skin, bones and soul. His heart thudded through his ears; his cock throbbed beneath his priestly attire, pressing urgently against the constricting black fabric.

He struck Will harder this time, at the center of his back, fueling the action with his feverish mix of wrath and excitement, and Will mewled, "Oh, Father...ohhh...!"

"Are you sorry?" Hannibal demanded. "Do you think your sins truly consist of such common, human frailties? Do you still refuse to confront the true wrongs you have committed against--" *You and me, against us.* "--The Lord by refusing to trust in His plan for you, refusing to love and treasure yourself when he has made you the way you are in His wisdom? It is not for you to question His reasons for making you suffer. You are to *submit*, Will, with love, patience and acceptance in return. You are to admit you are beautiful at your worst, lowest point."

"I can't do that," Will sighed heavily. His arms hung over the rail, displaying his fresh wounds to ravishing effect. As tears streamed from his eyes, he was so much more heart wrenching to behold than the most realistic and faith-driven art of Jesus' suffering. "I don't know how to love myself. I see myself as ugly, it's all I know."

"Then you disrespect God, as you defy me," Hannibal snarled. He lashed Will again, five times quickly, relishing the wet, wanton moans and whimpers this evoked. Will shuddered, weeping and yet sounding so unmistakably pleased by the pain.

"My child, my sweet, wondrous child," Hannibal praised, his heart alight with joy and helpless appreciation. He had been defeated, after all, by this devout but self-hating boy's courage to face himself, to drag his sins out into the light, facing humiliation and torment in result.

“I’m not,” Will said, hiding his face. “I’m not, Father, I’m a wretched thing. I only hope the pain has begun to cleanse me.”

“Darling boy.” Hannibal put the flogger away and laid his hand gently on Will’s shoulder, just above a small stab scar which he would dearly love to bite. “You refuse to confess your true sin, clinging instead to artificial constructs of guilt. You cage yourself, but even in your confinement you cannot resist your true instincts. That is why you are here, is it not? The pain is your joy, your salvation, even if you will not fully admit why this is.”

“I should go,” Will sniffed, locking out the words of affection, admiration and forgiveness. But Hannibal used his hold on the young man’s shoulder to keep him firmly in place.

“We are not done here, Will. You must say your Act of Contrition. In the meantime, allow me to tend to your wounds.”

Will seemed to regard the offer of aftercare as a treat he must not outwardly accept, a dream he could allow himself to indulge in as long as he did not vocalize his need. Instead, he closed his eyes and launched into his prayer like the well-behaved Catholic boy he longed to be: *“Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee...”*

He flinched as Hannibal carefully dabbed alcohol over his wounds until they gleamed, smarting terribly at the antiseptic.

“And I detest all my sins,” Will swallowed, *“because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, aaaahhhh, Father, Father--”*

Hannibal smiled, smoothing a healing salve over the scratches. He knew how the icy hot sensation of the ointment would feel heavenly after the sting of the alcohol, how the pleasure of the broken skin would reignite under his firm, strong touch. Only one wound had been deep enough to make Will keep bleeding. He did not touch it with the ointment, but reached for a bandage to cover the lightly oozing scratch. It looked *delicious*; his mouth watered to touch the injured, bright red flesh with his tongue, lap away the tangy essence of Will’s pain, take it into himself to keep. He restrained himself, as he hoped to keep Will controlled. Until they could decide what to do about this, about *them*, he could do nothing more.

“Continue, please, Will.”

“But most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love.” At these words, Will opened his luminous, dreamy eyes. Through dark, damp lashes he gazed at Hannibal as the priest stood in front of him, closing up the first aid kit, then placing the lid on the ointment.

Hannibal helped Will back into his shirt, and when Will stood, the priest buttoned him up slowly, the prayer still falling from Will’s lips like a waterfall, *“I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.”*

A small amount of saliva had gathered at the corners of Will’s mouth where the flogging had caused him to drool. Hannibal traced the pump, bite-reddened lips with his index finger,

desire blazing restlessly in his whiskey amber eyes, as he swept the wetness onto his own skin.

“Amen,” Will murmured as they stood staring at each other in a kind of thrall.

Hannibal lifted a glass of water to Will's lips, and the younger man gulped it gratefully. "Easy, now," Hannibal soothed. He watched Will thoughtfully, considering the way this irresistible boy responded to pain. It was the same way Hannibal hoped he would respond to pleasure: as if he could not possibly get enough. Hannibal wanted to be the only one privileged to witness the marvelous beauty of Will's indulgence in either, in both simultaneously. In short, he longed to take care of him.

“You haven't been smoking since the night we met, have you? I don't want you to hurt yourself unless it's in a way I've approved, and unless it is done under my supervision.” Hannibal heard the husky lack of restraint in his lust-riddled tone and knew he was losing himself again.

“No, I haven't bought any more cigarettes. It was just an odd whim that day, but I can't regret it. When I think of the taste of tobacco, it tastes like the memory of our first conversation. It's wrong, but so sweet. I still see us so clearly. I feel us, Hannibal.”

“You must not say such things, my child, must not be so familiar...” Hannibal dropped his head as if in shame. In fact, he was simply so overwhelmed that he could not bear to look at Will. He needed to let the words Will had said reverberate through him until he could accept that they had been spoken, clarify his own purpose again.

“I'm not your child.” Will brushed curved fingers over Hannibal's cheek, then tipped his chin back up so that they were eye to eye, his own face tilted up to the priest in unmistakable devotion. “What would you say, if I told you to let me take care of you after you flogged yourself? Or if I said, Hannibal, you're not to hurt yourself again unless it's with my permission, before my eyes?”

“I can't,” Hannibal quivered slightly, then stepped back, his fists held tightly at his sides. He was trapped.

He could not give into the passion between them, or he would be lost in an affair where the only outcome was heartbreak. Only once in his life before had his heart been broken, over his sister, and he did not think he could survive another dose of that sort of pain, the kind to demolish one's autonomy, make of one a victim to grief and *need*, emotional dependence, *no*. Never again.

He could not pretend Will wasn't tearing him apart at the seams, changing him into a new man, someone who was almost as brave as Will. Almost brave enough to test waters that could drown him. But not quite.

“I can't do this, Will.” He envisioned himself broken down by love and rejected the fate, even as he feared God had designed it as a unique means of justice for all of his wanton destruction in life.

“Hannibal,” Will began, as if trying to be the reasonable one since Hannibal had suddenly vacated that position in their relationship.

Hannibal turned away from him. He grabbed the flogging tools from the table and stuffed them haphazardly into the bag he’d brought them in, along with the first aid kit. He forced himself to go without looking at Will again; he hurtled down the aisle like a reverse bridegroom, rushing into the bracing night air which had stolen the hopeful early Spring from the season. The door slammed shut behind him as he walked just as quickly to his car, the same way he had nearly bolted from Will in the woods earlier, as if there was any means by which he would not follow the path of his life right back to the man he adored.

As such, he did not see Will lingering on the alter, a baffled, conflicted but unmistakable smile spreading his lips.

The secret language

Chapter Notes

cw: referenced death of a dog

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“But it was the stupidity of passion, which would rather have nothing than a little.”

-E.M. Forster

Hannibal struggled to conjure a solution over the several days which followed. He allowed the absence of Will from his days to seep into his bloodstream like poison, an unsustainable peace.

Surely it would be better to run mad than to subsist on the little life support gusts of hope that Will would come to his senses and show up on the rectory doorstep, heart in hands, declaring his intent to divorce Molly and stay with Hannibal forever. He had to steal the hope from the jaws of an angry God who obviously had every intention of denying him happiness. From his past, he knew that hope and joy were only insubstantial, cruel teases with no follow-through, a means of excruciating defeat from the Almighty. Of course, he had little choice now but to yield in his former egomania to understand God had power over him, but it brought a prideful smirk to his face to realize his God was changing.

It looked much less like the vengeful God of the Bible, drowning the world for sins He provided every opportunity to embrace, blaming it all on people based on His image, at least when He wasn't blaming His own wayward angel Lucifer, who merely had the dignity to question His disloyal and conniving methods. It looked more like a tousle-haired earthly angel with eyes of blue-green sea glass and lips holding the kiss to save the darkest soul. Hannibal knew his God, and he longed to pray directly, pay homage with deep, amorous ritual.

He went about his priestly routine by day, slotting in a few murders by night, failing to make himself feel any of the previous delight in his own wickedness.

Finally, he could not take it anymore, could not even summon enough of his stubborn self-interest, as if it was an old friend he'd fallen out of touch with. If he was to be a fool, so be it, he decided. It would be the great mistake of his life, a dramatic downfall worthy of his devastatingly sinful ascent.

Jeanette had mentioned in passing that Molly Graham had a new job at a restaurant in town, and Hannibal took the liberty of asking around as to when his beloved's loathsome spouse

would begin her shift for the day. Accordingly, he arrived at Will's house to find only the young man's car in the drive, and the secure knowledge that Walter was at school.

They had the place to themselves for hours, he thought as his heart lifted in anticipation of the happy fact.

So he felt crestfallen when Will opened the door and took in his presence with a miserable expression. After all of Hannibal's careful distance and now his surrender, the man seemed almost impervious to what should have been a hugely meaningful reunion.

Will leaned on the doorframe, looking exhausted. Heaving a sigh, he said flatly, "Why are you here?"

"You're upset with me for staying away so long?" Hannibal asked, feeling swiftly defeated.

"No, I mean, I was." Will gave a frail shrug and leaned back to let Hannibal come in. "Not now."

The priest swept by him, their bodies brushing briefly, and then he was back in the room of their momentous second meeting, this time hushed in daytime shadows. All the curtains were drawn and the dogs were lying by the shuttered front window looking forlorn, heads down.

"You want some coffee or something?" It seemed that Will spoke only through a pained effort, and it touched Hannibal's heart that he was still offered civility despite the sadness permeating the environs.

He hesitated briefly with the sound of the rain pitter-pattering on the house, and Will standing in his plaid pajamas with his hair mussed and his glasses slightly crooked, as if he'd rolled out of bed and slapped them on when the doorbell rang. It was eleven am.

"I'll make it," Hannibal suggested.

He went to the kitchen and put on a fresh pot, then walked past Will, who had slumped down on the couch looking dejected, staring at the opposite wall.

"Rather a chilly day," Hannibal noted, and proceeded to light the fireplace, smiling when he leaned back from the fresh crackle of warming orange light. "Ah, that's better. I'll just get our coffee."

Will did not even bother to nod; he merely took the offered mug when Hannibal came back and sat beside him.

"What's happened, Will?" he asked quietly, blowing on his hot drink.

The younger man set the cup aside on the table without seeming to care whether it existed, or to know with much clarity where he was, much less why Hannibal was here.

"I--" Will put a hand to his mouth, crushing in the beautiful lips as his eyes watered over. He shook his head, suddenly almost frantic. His other hand tightened on his own knee and he got out, strangely, "Olive."

Hannibal looked from the man he loved to the huddle of mournful dogs across the room and understood. One was missing, the one who liked the priest so much. There were six dogs instead of seven.

“Oh, Will.” Hannibal reached for his hand, finding it unusually cold, ice-gripped as Will’s downcast eyes, like crystal death. “I’m so very sorry. When did this happen?”

“L-last night, we had to put her down. I was there, at the end, I held her.” Will’s chin shook and he pushed Hannibal away, sinking to the floor to grab his knees to his chest as he sobbed. His glasses fell on the rug; Hannibal retrieved them smoothly and set them on the table. “I knew she was an old girl and it was going to happen any day now, but I guess I still wasn’t ready. It’s stupid, I know, to...”

“It’s not stupid.” Hannibal remained where he was, hesitant to make another move and potentially spook him in his delicate state of grief. His voice was low and soothing, merging with the rainfall and rustling of the fire. Sinking into Will’s sadness like medicine. “Not in the least. It’s a loss.”

“Hold me?” Will asked in a broken way. His voice fell into his crossed arms over his knees, and when Hannibal sank to the floor beside him, the priest had to gently pry him open.

Will curled into Hannibal, head pressed to the priest’s heart, hands clinging fast and tight to his stiff black shirtfront as he soaked it in tears. Hannibal held on tightly in return, keeping Will close and warm, rocking him slowly. He stroked his free hand rhythmically through Will’s soft curls, then caressed the endearing elven shape of his pretty ears, the exquisite line of his jaw covered in stubble that scraped the priest’s loving fingertips.

Minutes slipped past, diamond dust swept away by the winds of time, and Hannibal held on, occasionally speaking in a quiet hum of comfort, simple affirmations, things he’d never believed and still did not, “*There, there, it will all be better soon. It will be alright, my dear.*”

Will looked up at him, eyes huge in the hush. “Why am I always crying?”

Hannibal kissed the center of his forehead with a smile so soft and loving he felt it split his heart down the middle, releasing red rivulets of helpless emotion. “My dear,” was all he said, all that was needed. He kissed the side of Will’s brow as the grief-chilled skin went from clammy to flushed under his wandering lips. They were coming back to life.

“More,” Will whispered, a secret, and Hannibal obliged with light, barely-there kisses to each of his tear-streaked cheeks, then beside each of his beautiful sea-deep eyes, his hand sinking into Will’s hair in a firm hold at the back of his head. Will melted into his guidance, leaning up to kiss Hannibal’s cheeks, his jaw, his neck just below his ear. It wasn’t clear if Hannibal was moving Will in time with his own desires or if Will was controlling the path of heated kisses, but they sensed it was probably both.

Will’s breath came hot and heavy as they clasped each other tighter, kiss following kiss, their lips moving faster and with increasing desperation, all over their faces, down their necks, Will pulling Hannibal forward by his shirt, Hannibal tugging on Will’s hair, the curls twined around his fingers like silk. His heart skipped a beat at the spark in Will’s eyes as he surged

up to kiss the priest's mouth at last. Hannibal's lips brushed Will's, feather-light at first, both of them incapable of resisting and terrified of what this would do to them. It was almost nothing, such a tiny hint of the love Hannibal had to pour out all over him like holy wine but Will was breathless with curiosity and need; he was so perfect. Will thought he was pathetic, weak and ugly, and he was perfect. Everything Hannibal could ever need and much more, euphorically too much. It ached in his heart.

"You never answered my question," Will murmured, and Hannibal lowered him to the rug, keeping his head cradled until he released it against the soft landing.

The priest pinned Will's pliant, trembling body beneath his own and kissed his lips again, gently still. "You've just been lonely too long," he replied, and then he licked into Will's mouth as the younger man moaned against the sensation of their tongues stroking together.

Hannibal controlled himself only by the barest remnant of his power; he needed this to be what Will needed, so he channeled his strength into not tearing Will's clothes off and fucking him so hard he screamed, although the primal urge to do so was almost more than he could bear. Instead, he sucked Will's tongue attentively, loving the way it made the smaller man wriggle against him, inadvertently bringing their groins to brush in a tantalizing realization that they were both so very hard.

"Huhhh," Will muttered, "God, more, *more*." He wrapped his legs around Hannibal as they ground together, Hannibal kissing deeper, then sucking Will's lower lip, biting it so that Will whimpered as he had beneath the whip, in love with the sweet succor of pain which only his priest knew how to bestow.

Hannibal dipped his head and mouthed at Will's neck, moving his hips in time with Will's naively insistent grinding, his first time feeling another man's erection sliding against his own. The clothes were a foolish, insubstantial and doomed boundary; Will yanked at Hannibal's shirt and got it free from his trousers; he groped at Hannibal's ass as the priest bit and sucked his neck. He felt the long, deep scars of flagellation so much more severe than the matching marks on his own back, but they were one in this, their masochism and sadism and sin, the enveloping dark heat of them. Hannibal yanked the soft grey flannel of Will's pajama top in an impatient search for more bare skin to claim with his greedy mouth, licking in broad sweeps at his collarbone before sinking his fangs in again, and neither of them heard Will's shirt button roll away on the soft floor.

Their hearts beat raggedly, pressed close as Hannibal registered Will's nails scoring into the wounds on his back with a jolt and a deep, elated groan.

"My darling," Hannibal gasped in amazement, thinking how gorgeous his love would be in the full flush of his murderous becoming, covered in blood and viscera, shaking in his hands, needing his help to understand and bloom, as he would help him now, as he would show him.

For Will, the great shock was how easy it was, the complete, beautiful surrender of himself to Hannibal's desire, letting it knock him off his feet like a wave. He didn't need to think, he didn't need to second-guess how he looked, if he was doing the right things with his hands or

his body; he sensed Hannibal's joy as easily as he drew breath into his lungs, as simply as his heart understood how to keep beating. He needed nothing more than to feel.

The man above him, kissing him so urgently and deeply, consuming him down to the bone with his dominating, roving hands all over Will, he was still a mystery. The priest still hadn't told Will a damn thing about who he really was or what he wanted, but somehow it didn't matter. Will knew. He felt, he understood, he loved. He rolled them over, smiling through his drying tears as Hannibal looked up at him reverently, panting slightly with a restrained lust which Will thought he could taste in his mouth, dark honey to match the shade of the priest's worshipful eyes locked to his face. Will smiled wider, never having known before now that he wanted to be worshipped.

He could imagine himself undressing them, placing Hannibal's big, strong hands on his ass, rocking them together, taking the priest's cock deep inside him. He'd felt the girth of Hannibal's erection against his own thick length with the sudden knowledge he was now insatiable. He was the animal; he would take what was his as steadily and surely as Hannibal offered it, and that was relentless.

After a few moments of staring and heavy breathing, taking into himself the startling reminder that this was truly happening, Will fell upon him with every intention of them making full, shameless love right here on the living room floor of his nuptial abode. Guilt and consequence could be damned; he needed to be naked with Hannibal, closer than close, he needed to feel them as one.

They kissed as if they had been lost for centuries only to find their home at last. They licked and sucked at each other, bit until they drew small drops of blood to share and mix on their tangling tongues. Hannibal covered him with his wet, slick mouth, his scent of manly cologne and church incense, his *everything*. Will could not believe the way they fit together, but he should have known it from their dance, that they were made to do this. He'd been a fool to think he could fight it.

Then, as Will beamed at Hannibal and shyly plucked his Roman collar open, exposing his lovely throat, as the priest found the angel wing tracks of the fading whip scratches on his back, they heard a car pull into the driveway.

Panicking, Will scrambled away as Hannibal stood more slowly, a sullen look taking over his face. "You've got to go," Will urged him, grabbing his big, warm, distracting hand and tugging him in the other direction towards the kitchen door.

Hannibal frowned but complied, allowing himself to be placed out in the backyard as if what they had been doing was an embarrassment, a blight to be moved out of sight when real life came back in. As if this was only an affair. Will *hated* the way it felt, but what the hell else was he supposed to do?

He looked at Hannibal in a wordless plea for him to understand the obvious necessity of this. Perhaps it was Will's desperate appearance, his blue eyes sharp in the light of the cold grey afternoon, his cherubic lips too-many-times-kissed, swollen with it, his cheeks pink and upper body half-exposed with the buttons Hannibal had loosed in a haphazard daze of

passion. Maybe Hannibal saw the physical evidence that he had changed Will, as he had changed. His hurt, aggravated expression faded into softness again.

Will could have laughed; he could have cried for another few days or screamed on the top of his lungs. All of these options made total sense, but he just whispered, "*Go!*," and Hannibal did, slipping away right before Molly's voice rang through the house behind Will, calling his name.

He closed the door as silently as he could, made hasty work of re-buttoning most of his pj's, and began making the dogs' food for their next meal, which was coming up soon anyway. When Molly came into the kitchen, she said nothing of his disheveled pajamas and red eyes; they were to be expected after the rough time they had experienced with Olive the night before.

"Honey, I came home on my break to make sure you were okay," Molly murmured, lingering by his elbow as he sensibly applied himself to the task at hand, emptying the Tupperware of homemade dog food into a pan to warm it on the stove.

As he turned briefly to face her, he kept his bottom lip sucked in so she wouldn't see the lingering traces of blood from his mad kisses with Hannibal. He nodded, feeling awful again, feeling like he was back in his padded cell of impossible choices. She was so good to him, and he was unquestionably a disgrace.

She kissed his cheek, where Hannibal had kissed him so recently his skin still burned from it, and a shiver of "*no*" went through him unspoken, swallowed back in duty and his resolve to getting through this encounter somehow. He needed this to be over, but he had to find the right words, the way to let Molly down easy.

Right now, his sin was written across him so boldly he was astonished she didn't say so. Couldn't she see it, as if Hannibal had branded him with every fiery kiss?

He turned to the stove, busying himself as much as he possibly could. "Thank you, Molly, I'm okay. I think I just need to take a day to breathe and feel better."

"I bet, I don't think you slept a wink last night. You look like a wreck," she sighed sadly.

He did not want, nor deserve her sympathy and kindness; he was trapped by them, but it was his fault. He'd put himself here.

"I'll take a nap after I feed the dogs," he said as lightly as he could.

She nodded, "Good," and patted his back.

He forced himself not to wince, as he always had to when her incidental touches came against the whip wounds. Over the last few days, the scratches had started to heal more, and he dreaded the time when they would fade completely. He and Molly had been so far from intimate lately that there was no fear of her seeing his naked back and discovering the unexplainable injuries, but that was more a damning cut of further shame than a relief.

Will noticed that the dog food could use some more carrots and hurriedly grabbed some from the fridge, then began slicing them into thin ribbons. Molly watched him and he hated the sensation of her eyes on him, hated the harmless facts of her teal waitress uniform and inescapable goodness, the inevitability of his betrayal. Worst of all, he almost resented her for interrupting and stealing the already stolen bliss of his first kisses with Hannibal away from him.

“Really, I’m fine, you should go back to work,” he said, his voice despicably bland.

“Will,” she gasped abruptly, “Pay attention to what you’re doing!” She rushed to his side, as Will looked down to notice he’d sliced his finger open, blood splattering onto the carrots on the cutting board. He felt nothing; he was too wrapped up in his miserable confusion to connect with the sensation of pain. All he heard was Hannibal’s voice telling him not to hurt himself again unless the priest gave his permission and guidance to the act, and he wanted to show Hannibal his bleeding finger, wanted to plunge it deep into his love’s welcoming mouth.

“It’s okay,” he waved Molly off as she tried to help him. “I’ll grab a bandaid and clean up this mess.” He found the box of bandages above the aspirin in the cabinet by the kitchen door and wrapped his finger accordingly, watching the red blotting against the plastic confines of the bandaid, trying to gush out, but there was nowhere to go.

He glanced out the window at the tranquil-seeming yard. Hannibal was gone, of course, but he wasn’t gone. Molly stared at Will’s stricken face as Will stared out the window.

And there was nowhere to go.

Chapter End Notes

The kiss scene was definitely inspired by the first "Jemily" kiss scene on *Revenge* ❤️

Sweet surrender

Chapter Notes

cw: a brief incident of sexual harassment. This is also the chapter where the darker tags and warnings of the fic come into play.

“Hey, Dad,” Walter said carelessly a few nights later. Will had just come in through the kitchen door with three pizza boxes clutched in his hands like a peace offering.

Walter calling Will “Dad” had been Molly’s idea, a way of sealing them in the notion of “family” that never seemed to quite take root in either Will or Walter’s understanding. Even now, when Walter said the word it didn’t sound like *family* so much as “*hey you.*”

“We already had dinner a while ago, you know. It’s eight-thirty.” Walter quirked a brow, caring for about one second before he shrugged Will off again. “I’m going to Miles’s house, be back by bedtime.”

Miles lived at the next house down the road, a few easy leaps of yard between them. If only the path to Will’s escape could be so easily achieved.

“Bye,” Will said, voice weak as he set the pizza down on the counter and scratched his head in confusion. How was it eight-thirty already?

“Surprised he recognizes you at this point.” Molly came into the kitchen with a chilly, disapproving look. She sat down at the counter, flapped open a pizza box and took out a slice of plain cheese, folding it and taking a bite. “I almost don’t either.”

“I guess you mean...”

“*You’re never home, Will,*” she accused, her eyes narrowed. “And it’s not like I have to ask where you’ve been.”

“Well, there’s been a lot going on at church, some events to get ready for, some repairs to help Father out with--”

It sounded so fucking weak, Will could have kicked himself. Even the word “Father” didn’t sound nice and formal and clean when he said it; it came out soft and loving, an obvious admission of everything he’d done, and worse still, all the things he desperately wanted to do that had not yet come to pass.

“Riiighhht,” she gestured at him with the pizza slice, a formidable presence in her t-shirt and lounge pants.

Molly put the food aside; it had just been something to do, he understood that, as if a snack would make this situation normal and domestic, but it was only painful. Everything else they might try to pretend about it would be pathetically unconvincing. He had lived that way for so, so long, pressing himself to try and belong here.

She stood and crossed her arms. “It seems like *Father Lecter* just can’t get a single damn thing done around there unless you help him out. And you are just so immensely devoted to his cause.”

“Molly.” Will set his mouth in a flat line. Was this it, the big blow-out, should he just let it be?

She rolled her eyes. “*Will.*”

Did it happen like this, Molly looking so much *herself* as he would always remember her during their relationship when it seemed good? With her pretty hair in that messy bun and her shining blue eyes a shade lighter than his own, yet her complete ownership of this situation, defeating him like it was nothing. He knew he looked as much like an idiot as he felt, coming in with dinner at the wrong time. His skin felt like artifice and his body a prison the moment he walked into this house.

Should he come out with it? At this point, his sins, though great, were forgivable. He hadn’t slept with Hannibal, had not even kissed him since their wild near-fornication in front of the fireplace. He really *had* spent his time lately in fixing up a broken pew, attending a prayer group and manning the soup kitchen, organizing the parish’s charitable donations, and letting Hannibal’s strained patience drive him slowly crazy. They were stuck, all three of them, and he was the only one with the power to unstuck them.

“Bet you let the good, righteous, most holy Father Lecter comfort you about Olive, huh?” Molly glared at him. “Even though you won’t let me anywhere near you anymore.”

“I did talk to him about Olive’s death. I was hurting, and he...” Will shrugged. “He’s a good pastor. He’s very understanding.”

“Hmm, guess I’m not that great of a wife, then. Too many things I can’t seem to understand.” Molly slammed the pizza box shut and went to the fridge, yanking out a bottle of chardonnay and tipping it with a heavy hand into her glass.

“You’re a fantastic wife, Molly, and you know it. It isn’t--”

“You’re completely checked out of our therapy sessions; you sit there like a robot.”

Will felt himself getting frustrated now. Huh, that was interesting; he had never known another feeling about their breaking marriage, aside from blaming himself. Sometimes it was easy to forget there were two of them responsible for the union.

“That’s not fair, Molly. It really isn’t as if you’ve been forthcoming with Dr. Rachel yourself. I know you’ve been just as frustrated with me as I’ve been confused and distant, but we just

kind of sit there and talk about our uncomfortable date nights like that's going to help us move forward."

"Well, ya know, maybe I'm a little concerned that if I open up the floodgates of my own insecurity, it'll push you even further away. Maybe I'd rather have you here in whatever pathetic, dwindling capacity you can still manage, than lose you because we were anything as stupid as *honest* with each other." She paused, seeming surprised by her own words.

Will fumbled to think of a suitable reply, so she added impatiently, "You can't deny that's exactly what would happen, can you? There's nothing holding this marriage together that your precious *priest* couldn't tip over and shatter with the tiniest little nudge."

"He's not--"

"Yes he is!" She put her wine glass down on the counter so fast that the pale liquid sloshed around and splashed the counter. Uncaring, she threw her hands up, eyes blazing. "Yes he is, and you fucking know it! He's completely taking advantage of your emotional vulnerability and his position of authority, by the way, it's *sickening*. You do know he's not *actually* Jesus Christ, right? He's just a man."

Oh, she really had no idea. That was probably for the best. Better that she not realize how he and Hannibal worshipped each other, how they would be happiest living in and through each other with decadent, violent abandonment. Hannibal was so, *so* much more than a man; he was a drug in human form and Will was addicted. He was holy in his most profane corruption, stunningly beautiful in his tenderness, and there was something truly scary in his mystery that Will wanted to take out and taste and keep for his own forever. But Hannibal was a man, too, somehow, breathtakingly human and *his* man, his world.

Perhaps Will had put too much effort in clinging to the threadbare remains of his decency. It was only making the damage worse. He should have listened to Hannibal weeks ago and come out with what he wanted, said it openly to him and to Molly. It wasn't too late.

"Molly, listen," he reasoned, deciding that yes, he would simply confess to her now, put it all out there. Nothing he could say would hurt more than the spider's web of tormented suspense in which they were caught.

But as his brow furrowed and his lips parted to speak his truth, she put her hand up to stop him.

"I don't want to listen to you right now. I don't want to hear any more of your lame excuses in that fake-nice voice of yours, Will, okay?" She scowled, reached into her cardigan pocket and slapped something small and round down on the counter between them.

He stared at it, and it slowly dawned on him that it was the missing button from his grey and red plaid pajamas, the one which Hannibal had twisted off as they rolled around on the living room rug.

"I think you lost this," she accused. Then she exited the room like a raging storm cloud, one Will was far too wise to follow.

She wouldn't really *let* him explain what was going on because she didn't want to know, even though she *knew*. She refused to tolerate the truth, as if a good enough scolding would make Will change his heart. His head was spinning; he had to get out of there for a while. Again.

The bar wasn't the sort of place where Hannibal would normally go, but he was moody and restless, under the influence of a misery he had to vent. His best method of venting was through murder, and right now he could use both a good, strong drink and the feeling of a human life breaking like a twig in his powerful hands.

When it came to Will, he was feeling powerless. It grated on him, humiliating and wretched, hopeless. He had been so determined not to allow himself to be "the other man," a passing affair in Will's life which would be forgotten and cast aside in due time, but here he was. Looking at his phone every five minutes hoping for some three word text at least, anything from Will. An "*I love you*," an "*I miss you*," an "*I'm thinking of you*" would have been good enough.

But Will said nothing, as he had said nothing every day at church, arriving with his tools and working hands and a shy smile, offering to work all day at any little task that needed doing. It used to be enough, but Hannibal couldn't take it anymore. He had to have all of Will, or nothing at all.

Hannibal tucked his phone into his coat pocket and pushed through the cheap door of the scuzzy little bar with its doubtless unsanitary accommodations. He climbed onto a barstool with a rip in its fabric, the most pristine out of the sneer-inducing selection of seats in this disreputable hell-hole.

"Whiskey, neat," he nearly barked at the bartender, surprised at the undisguised ferocity in his own voice. He really was close to spiralling; he must endeavor somehow to reel himself back in.

The bartender, a half-asleep looking fellow, gave him a disinterested once-over. He had the common sense not to annoy Hannibal by flinching at the frightening glint in his dark eyes or the gravel in his tone. Nefarious-looking patrons must be a given of his job. Within moments, a thick glass tumbler of dark amber liquor had been placed before him. Hannibal would indulge only one drink, just enough to hopefully settle his wildly rebellious nerves.

He had chosen this place for several reasons, not least of all the fact that it was hardly likely to be occupied by any church-goers who might recognize the priest and be able to recall his specific presence there later if questioned by the authorities. He had mastered many such illusionary tactics in his ongoing trail of killings. It was also helpful to display a different M.O. for each crime, so it never looked like they had been committed by the same person. How convenient, since his last victim had been artfully arranged in a tableau devoted to the Greek ideals of love, while this evening he was more in the mood to rip, tear, dig in with his bare hands and his teeth.

It merely remained to wait for a suitably despicable human specimen, which could only be a matter of time given the setting.

As he had expected, from within the din of loud, obnoxious drunks around him, one person did stand out. A hulking man with a crude leer in his eyes, fixated on a young brunette woman at the end of the bar. She kept stepping back, trying to elude his interest, but he merely stepped forward as if to trap her in the conversation, which doubtless involved a proposition. It was like a silent movie whose dialogue he could intuit effortlessly, a sadly commonplace tale of harassment which the other bar patrons were so accustomed to that they were so far ignoring it.

The girl's features came into better view as Hannibal slowly slinked towards them. He almost did a double-take; she reminded him of Will with her big azure eyes and wavy dark hair which caught in autumn red under the flickering bar lights. Then again, he suspected himself capable of contorting any reality to the shape of Will by now; his obsession had long since careened out of his conscious ability to control. His mind played tricks on him, his common sense trailing somewhere behind him like a dead limb.

The way she looked made him nearly feral to demolish her aggressor. Was it because he fantasized about saving Will from his various prisons, both self-imposed and forced on him by the doldrums of a normal life, the judgements of small-minded fools? Was it because he needed some *part* of Will to be involved in this attempt to stave off his obsession through violence? It did not really matter, he supposed. It only mattered that inspiration had struck, devil-driven and unstoppable, a train on the tracks.

"I believe the young lady asked you to leave her alone," said Hannibal coolly. He had dressed down for the evening in a grey sweater and dark blue trousers; the only sign of his priestly identity was the effortless air of superiority in his bearing.

"It's none of your fucking business, buddy," the burly, repugnant specimen practically spat at him. His eyes were vacant as his mind. Hannibal hated his kind: casual abusers. He let himself be infused with the fancy that Will would hate him too, which led to his dream of the two of them as partners in the hunt.

"I'm making it my business." Hannibal stood tall with his hands clasped behind his back, unflappable. His intended victim was several inches taller and quite a bit heavier, so he must have been used to winning most confrontations. Not this time.

It wasn't physical size that mattered, but cunning, training and experience, the visceral thrill of the hunt most of all, what he called to himself a killer instinct. A calling, as strong as the call of heaven which compelled some men to the priesthood or women to become nuns. A destiny, one he yearned to share. The loneliness of it had nearly sucked the joy out, yet he was never lonely before Will, before the lack of being able to fully claim the man he loved.

"Listen, why don't you take your weird fucking accent and fuck the fuck off, huh? No one cares about your little crusade, and it ain't gonna get you in her pants." The idiot had the nerve to point at the nervous young woman with his drink glass as he added, "I saw her first, right honey?"

"I want you to leave me *alone*," the girl answered her would-be assailant, blunt and brave, like Will.

Hannibal wished she was Will; he tried to pretend that's who he could rescue. He saw himself up on a sleek, fierce black horse with red shining eyes; he would carry Will away into a bloody rebirth so they could find their bliss.

"But since you clearly won't, I'm going to leave instead." She frowned, replacing her wine glass on the bar and shrugging her leather jacket on, her dark curls bouncing around her delicate shoulders. Tossing a cursory glance at Hannibal, she added, "Thanks for trying to help, stranger."

As she made for the exit, her harasser tried to give chase, but Hannibal got a vice grip on his arm, surprising the other man with his strength. "Get your hands off of me, freak, before I call the cops on you!"

Hannibal held on until he knew the woman would have had enough time to get into her car and leave. Then he let go with a small, deadly smile. "My apologies. I'll leave you now."

And only for now.

Monsignor Breguet, the older priest who had been his mentor during his novice days of training for the holy life, had often compared Hannibal's personality with that of a cat. And just like a cat, Hannibal did so enjoy playing with his food. He'd stare at it intently, bat it around in his claws, then let it go just to wait a nice long time before giving chase, when it was least expected. Once the chase began, there was no escape for his prey, only destiny closing in to block out all the light.

Two hours later, the man's truck broke down by the woods and he scrambled out, tipsy, swearing under his breath. He had not noticed the shiny black car which had trailed him at a slight distance and now parked neatly behind him. The man examined his by-now fully deflated tire and swore vigorously before he happened to look up to see Hannibal looming before him in the shadows of the crisp night. Even this inebriated buffoon was wise enough to know a cause for true horror when he saw it; suddenly sensing the immediate peril of the situation, he shook his head and bolted for the forest, foolishly imagining that therein lay a reprieve.

Will didn't really know what made him decide to take a walk through the woods, but once he started it seemed much too hard to stop.

He had recurring dreams that started like this, a voyage into shadows from which he would never return, the delight of letting darkness eat him alive. The image of transformation, being reincarnated as a huge but elegant stag whose fur shone like satin in the moonlight. Chasing any prey he liked through the forest of thorns and teeth, one with the night and the bruising ground beneath his hooves, tearing into flesh, savoring his gruesome victories. The blood dripping from his teeth, and a mate to lick it into their kiss.

This wasn't that dream, or he didn't think so, anyway. He was just lost, and he wanted to get more so, until maybe he found a thought that made sense. If he went to the rectory now, he knew all too well what he and Hannibal would do; they would be naked in bed within

seconds, eating each other alive in a whole host of other ways. That would not solve the puzzle of how to be honest with Molly, how to shuck off his guilt enough to cause her that much pain, pain she even shielded herself against at every turn. His own defenses had finally come down, but hers were ironclad, and he didn't know what to do about that.

He held a flashlight tight before him as he strode through the woods, reflecting on the ferocious beauty of black branches, the unknowable creatures rustling through the bushes and diving into holes in the ominous spectres of trees with branches stretching into the stars like bleak daggers.

As he came close upon a clearing within an almost perfect encircling of trees, he stopped short at the sounds of agony which suddenly snagged on his ears. Startled, Will dove behind the nearest tree to hide from whatever terrible sight was about to meet his inevitably curious eyes.

He gathered his courage, then peeked at the scene before him, finding it contained a big man, stumbling weakly over the muddy forest floor, dropping blood into the earth from a great many incisions that covered his body, slicing across his shirtfront to leave yawning gashes, killing wounds that would bleed slow while he was rendered too weak to fight back. Over him stood a familiar figure who had transformed into a vivid, hypnotic monster, lit only by the stray light of a half-moon. Will did not dare shine his flashlight beam upon the killer who smirked, a malevolent gleam in his dazzling eyes. He did not need the illumination to put a name to this monster, nor the desire to claim him as his own, despite the nearly crippling horror squeezing his heart.

Hannibal watched for a few beats as his victim backed up, only one arm left unbroken to help him try and launch himself somewhere, anywhere away from his inescapable fate. Even the amusement in the priest's stunning, sleek, evil face was something very serious, deep and dark, something to swallow Will whole. Then the murderer -- for his beloved, his obsession, his dreamed-of escape and forbidden fantasy was just that, a wanton, shameless killer in the night -- the murderer surged forward, quick as lightning and twice as ruthless, slicing a new, instantly gushing bit off the stranger, leaving a pile of excised skin like pale ghosts clumping the muddy earth.

"Please," the man pleaded, and then Hannibal paused, not out of mercy or reconsideration.

He stopped as if he had instinctively *felt* that someone was watching him. With a deeper smirk, he dealt the killing blow, a quick swipe across the man's throat that silenced him at last while yet more blood oozed and Will wondered why he wasn't having a panic attack. Instead, he felt electrified by awestruck admiration.

"You can come out now," Hannibal said simply, and Will knew he had nowhere to run. He did not want to run.

He revealed himself, stepped out from behind the tree with his hands extended in a submissive posture, another surrender. He felt tears of mingled fear and joy streaming down his face and struggled to breathe, but everything passing between himself and Hannibal was a matter of beautiful recognition. He was falling through the looking glass and it did not

concern him as to what would happen next. He assumed Hannibal would kill him, and he didn't care.

What could be a more fitting or exquisite end, but that he should allow this feral, magnificent beast to tear him down where he stood? What exactly was he living for, that it was worth prioritizing over such a lovely fate?

Will had never felt love like this before, love rubbing against his bones and flooding his veins, love swimming in his brain, making him forget any other feeling or need. Hannibal, Hannibal. So gorgeous and deadly, cheekbones sharp as razors, lips painted in blood that had caked his fingernails and the front of his sweater, slicking it to the front of his powerful chest.

His face betrayed no emotion, no decision when he saw Will. He simply charged at him, blade in hand, like the perfect animal he was, muscle and blood and death.

He hurtled into Will and pushed him roughly against a tree, one hand planted harshly on Will's chest over his thundering heartbeat, the other wielding the knife against his cheek, tracing Will with the sharp, dripping blade like an artist sketches their subject for the first time. Will didn't move an inch; he let his body go slack into Hannibal's command. His breath shuddered in desperate craving, finally releasing in a feverish moan when Hannibal, still blank-faced but utterly focused, slid the knife over Will, just barely not breaking skin, gliding down the side of his face to his neck, moving down still, cutting neatly through the material of Will's henley, baring his flesh to the night.

Hannibal watched his own teasing movements with fascination, his mouth falling open, sharp teeth shining and dripping more blood. When the downward wandering knife slid to Will's trousers, he traced the blade over Will's hips, then his thigh, slowly moving to his groin, tracing the outline of Will's engorged cock standing stiff inside his jeans. There was no intent to injure, only a long, tickling caress. Will cried out, no words, just short gusts of wild desire, like a "*thank you*" or another of his whimpered pleas for "*more*."

Hannibal examined his face, the way Will watched him, brave and wide-eyed and committed, and he tilted his own face to one side, letting the knife drift into the cut he'd left in the front of Will's shirt to lazily skate along the softest part of his stomach.

"Hnnhhh," Will sighed, throwing his head back, then biting his lip. On some level, he wanted to thrust into the blade so that it entered his flesh, so that Hannibal could mark him -- scar him, lick the wound, or just kill him, it didn't make a difference. On another, he wanted the priest to drop the knife and hug him close, praise him for being such a good, watchful, trusting boy. *Yes, yes, yes*, he wanted it all. He wanted his monster, the one who had been hiding in plain sight all along.

Will lowered his face to say this, to find some way to put it into words even if they were his last breaths, but as soon as he looked at Hannibal's face, he saw something over the priest's shoulder that made him startle and cry, "Hannibal, look out!"

Hannibal didn't need to look. He understood immediately that his victim had managed one last burst of life that let him lunge forward like a horror movie villain, trying to attack even when it was so obviously pointless. For all intents and purposes, the man was already dead,

just strong enough that a final burst of adrenaline had manifested, like a phantom twitch from a corpse on a morgue slab. Hannibal felled the man with an easy elbow to his middle, and since he had released Will, the younger man rounded the victim and stamped down on his back, breaking his spine with a savage snap.

The man lay face-down in the mud, which would have suffocated him if he had any breath left. He had run out of last spasms and simply displayed himself prone, a collection of pulp constituting what was once a human.

“Will,” Hannibal moaned, lost in the wonder of seeing him so brutal, for the very first time.

Will couldn’t believe what he had done; his morality fought its way free from its fort for a moment and tried to reclaim him with a sudden mortification of guilt and horror at his own actions, but he was so *happy* to have finally acted on his grisly urges; he was aroused beyond belief by a thrum of violent power, he was thrilled beyond measure to show Hannibal, to make Hannibal *proud*.

Hannibal came to him, breathing heavy. He dropped the knife to the ground and kissed Will with reckless greed, taking Will’s worries away just as simply. They grabbed and bit at each other, tearing at clothing that fell to the ground like dead skin, and then they were groping and grinding, Will pressed to the tree again, Hannibal biting his neck harder than ever, sucking with enough strength to leave him purpled and owned. Will’s moaning was so profound and high-pitched that it made his lover growl, rubbing rough fingers over his nipples, following the dry friction with his indefatigable mouth, sucking Will’s nipples until the younger man thought he was simply going to come, that he did not even know how he had made it this far in the encounter without spilling his seed in a sudden, heart-rending tribute to this pleased adoration, their mutual worship.

Hannibal leaned back and grinned at him, wicked and delighted, and then took both their cocks in his large, capable hand. Will groaned in ecstatic shock, and Hannibal spat into his own palm, then gathered them together again in his hot, tight, wetter grip. Their lengths were throbbing, stiff and perfect, pressed flush so that Will stared down in amazement, disbelieving the strength of the pleasure which Hannibal wrought from him, slowly stroking them, then wetting the glide more with their mixed precum. He went on and on, staring at Will’s face, then down at their cocks as he fucked them into his eager fist, and Will hadn’t known, hadn’t even understood that there were feelings like this in existence, much less that he could experience them for himself. He arched up, artless and helpless as his balls tightened and he came with a spurt of messy semen all over Hannibal’s hand, and mere seconds later Hannibal joined him, grunting fiercely.

“Hannibal,” Will cried, shaking with bliss, too much to contain; he knew distantly they were filthy with damning evidence and just plain dirt, that he had just committed too many sins to count, and that this was the best moment of his life. He needed to be taken care of, more than he had ever needed anything.

Hannibal panted for a while against him, their foreheads pressed together, his fingers tight on Will’s biceps. Then he let go and cupped Will’s face with an elated, eerily adorable animal grin. “You understand. In my heart, I always believed you would understand, Will.”

“Yes, I see you, I understand.” Will’s breaths were coming ragged too, and he had latched onto Hannibal’s sweater, trying to keep himself upright. “I want you.”

“I’m yours, mylimasis, and have been from the first moment our eyes met. You are even more remarkable than I guessed on that first day.”

“And you...” Will laughed through his continued tears, feeling *crazy*, unhinged, his thoughts surging in every direction. He had never felt *this* unpredictable, so utterly chaotic. “*You*, Hannibal...my God.”

“As you are mine.” Hannibal smiled so sweetly then, and somehow the blood all over his skin just made it even cuter. The sight of him cut into Will’s heart with a lovely pain of happiness.

“I...” Will reoriented himself slightly to the scene of their crime. “I want so much to be with you, but what are we gonna do? We’ve completely covered this place with our DNA. What were you thinking, you’re not even wearing gloves...”

“I wasn’t thinking about anything but you.” Hannibal looked miraculously unbothered, as if he really didn’t give a damn what happened next because they had experienced this one perfect moment of togetherness and understanding. “I’m still not. I seem to be losing the skill.”

“*I love you*,” Will panted, and he leaned in to capture Hannibal’s mouth with his own, to savor the tangy blood between them and rove his hands all over the priest’s strong back, feeling at home here in hell.

Hannibal clutched him so tightly that it hurt and kissed him rough and hard, shoving his tongue aggressively deep inside Will. It was obvious, after all his careful reserve, that Will had taken away his composure and left him impetuous, dominating and demanding, so greedy. The things he did were almost uncomfortable but fucking perfect, sending new waves of pleasure through Will’s body at the way he was needed and taken. So much pleasure in pain and in pushing harder than Will should be able to take. But Will was brave and he would take it all; his own hunger would never fade.

Then suddenly, a dampness fell into Will’s hair to coincide with the savage way Hannibal kept pulling on it as he kissed harder and deeper, unable to be satisfied and simply getting higher, more euphoric off the taste of Will. He got distracted by Hannibal’s delightful mouth and his velvet tongue, so much that plenty more droplets of rain water had pelted his head and started to slick the remains of their clothing to their bodies before he reacted.

“Oh,” he laughed, collapsing slightly against Hannibal because the priest had kissed him so hard for so long he had literally stolen Will’s breath. “Look! I can’t believe it.”

A loud, threatening boom erupted in the sky, then the heavy clouds let loose, soaking Hannibal, Will, their victim and the earth with fast, thick rain.

It seemed so eloquent, so appropriate, really, for what were the two of them together, if not a torrential downpour?

There wasn't going to be a shred of evidence; it was all washing away before their love-soaked eyes. In this remote part of the woods, dense with wildlife, the fresh meat wouldn't go to waste once the rain stopped. Meanwhile, the only proof the man was ever here would be his truck, easily dispatched.

Hannibal gave him a huge smile in return, perversely heartwarming in the circumstances. He reached down to the ground and scooped up the knife and Will's flashlight, which had fallen somewhere in the romantic affray. They buttoned each other back up in their pants with coy flirtation, then shrugged on their shirts. "Come with me," Hannibal grinned with a tug on Will's hand like it belonged to him, because it did.

After Hannibal deftly changed the tire while Will shivered in a daze and waited, they left the truck at the bar, which was still crowded and wouldn't close for another couple of hours. Then Will got into Hannibal's car and leaned across the armrest to give the driver a sloppy kiss on the lips, his heart pounding, both of them sopping wet. Will had a bizarre feeling then, as if he was phasing in and out of reality.

"Will? Can you hear me?" Hannibal noticed before Will did, that his eyes had gone slightly blurred as a massive dizzy spell set in. Maybe it was inevitable that the shock of what they had done, combined with nearly catching his death of cold out in the rain, would come back to get him. Will pitched forward and fainted into Hannibal's waiting arms, feeling completely safe and strangely, wonderfully at peace.

Because I told you so

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“And is your place in heaven worth giving up these kisses?” - Tori Amos

Will woke with a startled gasp and no idea where or when he was. Disorientation made his stomach swoop as he sat up in the sheets, his hand shooting blindly for his glasses, as if they were sure to be on the table beside the bed. And they were...it was just the wrong bed. Or the right one, depending on how you looked at it.

“Hello, Will.” Hannibal smiled gently at him. He was sitting in a chair pulled up to the side of the bed, a journal clasped in his lap, a pen left in the middle to mark the page he’d left off on. Tonight’s page, or was that today? “How are you feeling?”

“Thirsty.” Will reached to the bedside table and took the water glass which had been left for him. He sipped it gingerly, trying and failing to get his bearings.

“What time is it?” Will asked, brow furrowed as Hannibal moved to sit beside him on the bed.

“It’s seven thirty in the morning.” Hannibal gave Will time to fully absorb the moment, to notice that they were both clean and changed into fresh clothes, pajama pants and t-shirts that fit Hannibal perfectly and hung baggier on Will. “We’re safe, and everything is quite alright, my darling.”

Will gulped. Memories of the night before were slowly coming back to his awareness, much to his shock and disbelief -- finding Hannibal mid-murder, *helping* him finish the job -- Hannibal stroking the knife all over his body, the two of them naked and clutched together, slick with each other’s pleasure, *God* did it all really happen?

“Molly,” Will said simply, only because his next thought was that she must have been worried sick when he disappeared. He regretted the easily misinterpreted word as soon as it escaped his baffled lips; it made it seem like Molly was his first priority after every wildly intimate thing that had happened between himself and Hannibal.

Hannibal gave a tiny nod as annoyed impatience flashed in his eyes, thinly veiled by a tense smile. “Molly knows you are fine. I sent her a text last night.”

“A text? What did it say?” Will’s voice echoed through his own ears, painfully loud and aggravated.

Hannibal kept his voice calm, but it seemed to be a struggle, given Will’s grumpy, accusing attitude. He shifted position on the bed, his posture momentarily awkward. On him, such

body language was all too telling; Will was pissing him off now, almost on purpose. In total shock, his mind seemed determined to block out the disturbing, yet euphoric memories with displaced anger, so that he couldn't stop himself.

"I told her that you were with me," Hannibal explained. "Better that morsel of the truth than the whole one, wouldn't you say? And better to give her some inkling on the subject rather than leave her to fear for your safety when you never came home."

"Jesus, you enterprising bastard." Will blew out an indignant breath. "You love the fact that she knows I was here."

Hannibal pulled his hand back from Will's. "You're quite right. I want her to know where you are, and if it were up to me, she would already know very clearly that you are now mine. But if I did not know any better, Will, I would think you are blaming me for the fact that you are a married man."

"Hannibal," Will murmured, miserable all of a sudden. His eyes watered over; his head felt aflame, sickly sweat slicking his brow. Without Hannibal's anchoring touch, the bed felt like a ocean of tumultuous waves trying to drag him under to drown.

But Hannibal wasn't looking at him; he wasn't listening. He got off the bed and started pacing, looking quite unintentionally endearing in his pajamas pants and bare feet. The bruise on his cheek and scabs on his knuckles only made Will's heart go out to him more, and he regretted his tirade, but Hannibal was now off on his own.

"I certainly did not come to you, several years ago, and say 'Will, do you know what would be a wonderful idea? You should absolutely ask for Molly's hand in holy matrimony'--"

Will tried again: "Hannibal, please--"

"No, I did not," Hannibal continued, "And yet you have always treated me as if I am the instigator of our affair, and you are an innocent victim of my admittedly impressive seductive wiles. Well, let me just tell you--" Finally, he stopped, as he had turned a corner in his latest pacing circle around the bedroom to notice that Will was trembling and clutching his belly.

His stern, snobbish expression fell away, revealing only tender concern. "Will, what's wrong?"

"Feel so weird," Will admitted, worried he was going to swoon into unconsciousness again. The world was tilting.

Hannibal was back, gently taking him by the shoulder and pressing his other hand to Will's clammy brow.

"Feel seasick?" Will tried to explain. "Jittery, can't sit still, but don't wanna move. I feel -- like I'm gonna --"

He scrambled out of the bed, wobbly-legged, while Hannibal called, "Will, wait, let me help you."

Thank God, the first room he managed to find after leaving the priest's bedroom was the one he needed, the bathroom. Will hit his knees roughly, just in time to vomit profusely into the toilet. Pain radiated from his knees from the impact and he whined between retching bouts. A wild cacophony of flashbacks whirled through his memory, visions of the night before, horrid and bewitching, frighteningly wrong, yet everything he had ever wanted in his most secret dreams, deep in his heart.

Hannibal crouched beside him, rubbing his back through the ordeal. When Will was done, he leaned on the older man, who helped him to clean up and brush his teeth. Will's t-shirt was discarded and he shuddered, hot and cold at the same time.

"I'm sorry," Will muttered, slumped against Hannibal in a messy hug. He could barely make himself cling on, but he directed his energy stubbornly to meet the goal. "I woke up and bit your head off. I just felt so fucked up, lashing out seemed easier than *remembering*."

"You're experiencing an adrenaline crash," Hannibal said patiently. He guided Will back to bed and Will climbed into his lap, then nuzzled into his neck and shoulder, feeling lost and needy.

"Symptoms include the jitters you spoke of, and stomach upset." The priest massaged the back of Will's neck, then his back, easily finding all the areas of knotted tension and releasing them. Will moaned into him.

"Your blood pressure is likely elevated, and you may experience some feelings of depression. It may be difficult to understand that the trauma, or the thrill -- depending on how your mind is interpreting it -- is now over. You will fear a reprisal of trauma, or resent the loss of the thrill."

"You're afraid I regret what happened?" Will said, his voice moist and weak against Hannibal's cool skin.

"Yes, I'm terribly afraid, my dear. I let you see all of me, and you came far enough to see yourself in totality as well. I know it would be easiest to push me away to protect yourself from both of us." He cupped Will's face, thumbs rubbing his jaw in soothing circles. "But I need you, and I haven't the slightest idea of how to let you go."

Will shivered and Hannibal pulled the blanket up over his shoulders, then continued to hug him close. "You've n-never let anyone see you like that before."

"No. I've guarded myself against exposure of that kind at all costs, and with a great deal of work on my part to cover my past crimes."

"You're hurt," Will sighed. He ran his fingers over Hannibal's cheek where the skin shone in dark purple. His thoughts were like tiny fragments of glass; he couldn't make sense of them or keep the conversation going in any logical order. Each little piece was painful to handle, and each slipped away too easily once he had done so.

"He was a big man and put up quite a fight." Hannibal smiled, soft and loving. He didn't care that Will was so confused; he would take care of him. Will's heart softened, too.

Will kissed the bruise. "Am I hurting you more by sitting like this?"

"A little," Hannibal admitted. Will knew he was heavy, weak and collapsed against him like this, and that he must look odd, a full-sized man sitting on another's lap like a child seeking comfort. "But don't you dare move." Hannibal smiled, flashing his fangs this time, and Will's heart was now warm as well as soft.

"Why did you kill him?" Will stroked his fingers languorously through Hannibal's hair, which was soft yet slightly wiry with silver strands. He loved it.

"He was going to hurt someone who looked like you."

Hannibal spoke directly, open as he had been in the forest, blood-drenched and beckoning Will to See. His face was devoid of guilt or shame; the only vulnerability was a slight, visible worry that Will was going to reject him if he heard much more of the details. It showed in the tiny crease on his aristocratic brow and the nervous set of his sumptuous lips.

"So...have you done it before?"

Hannibal swallowed, almost as if he could taste the dry terror in Will's mouth. "Many times. But I haven't killed like that in years, so brutally and with my bare hands. After the last time we had seen each other, and how we left off, then not hearing from you for a while, I needed to expel my unbearable frustration somehow."

Will took it all in: Hannibal's selfishness, that he would commit murder to blow off some steam; the stark fact that his obsession with Will was so intense, he could only express his torment in their separation by such gruesome extremes. He felt a twinge of deep, if slightly guilty pleasure at the more accurate portrait of the man before him, the interior topography of the killer's complicated, twisted, beautifully compelling soul. Perhaps inevitably, Will was flattered and aroused, his fascination increasing even as Hannibal's explanation provoked more questions that should be thoroughly problematic and upsetting.

"Tell me, really," Will entreated, guessing at the right question to ask next, the one that felt most relevant: "Who is the apostle you most admire?"

"Judas," he replied calmly, rubbing his thumbs over Will's arms, then smoothing a broad palm over his cheek. "Although I also feel a certain affinity for Lucifer, the morning star. How powerful his defiance, rewarded with infamy, but still the devil labors on against his maker. Can you imagine the strength it must take to continue such a fight, cultivating sin using the raw materials of human nature? It seems to me he must care a great deal more about humanity than God does. You'll observe he certainly spends a great deal more time on us than the supposed Almighty."

"You became a priest to defile the occupation regularly; you are in league with the devil." Will Graham the Profiler was back, drawing strong, fast conclusions as his mind continued to clear. "Why, because you feel like God made us in his image and then tossed us down here with nothing but our feckless free will to earn us a dubious shot at heaven? What would you want with heaven anyway? I'm trying to fathom where you came up with this resentment."

Hannibal was emboldened to continue, because Will did not draw away, did not flinch from him even at his extreme ideology. Still, his face was drawn with distinct worry he was hovering on the precipice of an inevitable rejection. He wondered how long he would live with that fear of being unlovable festering in his heart, if it would outlive Will's own insecurity on that count. He could barely remember the perfect confidence he used to feel before falling in love.

"It was enforced upon me by grievous circumstance, although I do not consider my mentality moulded entirely by childhood events. I merely see life as it is, fully, and I embrace it. I don't fear reprisal from a maker who kills on a daily basis thousands of times over, through neglect. I can't possibly aspire to God's level of cruelty."

"I've been afraid to ask you about your childhood," Will confessed, his eyes wide on Hannibal's enigmatic face, even now half-shuttered to his apt analysis. "I just had a feeling somehow--"

"You were right to be afraid." Hannibal's choice of words made a cold feeling slide down Will's spine. It left no doubt that what happened had been beyond horrifying and traumatic. "Let us just say I do not care a whit for heaven, as far as my own eternal destination is concerned. But my *sister*, Mischa, deserved to arrive there only in her old age, not snatched away in another case of God's obvious enjoyment in watching us suffer while He does not lift a finger to protect us from horrors far worse than anything I would ever be guilty of. *Ever*."

Will nodded. "I'm so sorry about your sister, Hannibal."

Hannibal examined his pale features, wan from more than the adrenaline crash. "Are you going to leave me now that you have heard my secrets?"

Will shook his head emphatically. "Why would I leave you? You told me to stay where I am." He snuggled up tighter to the priest, adding in a husky tone, "We're together now. I don't have to condone everything about you to love you. I can't not love you. I do *understand* you, and you're mine."

"Will Graham," Hannibal smiled, "You are an angel, in love with a demon."

He kissed Will's forehead, relieved to find it was less clammy, closer to Will's normal body temperature, which naturally ran high. They were always cold against hot, righteous against reckless, identically opposite.

Will hummed in thought. "I used to think I was a demon. That I must be, if I wanted to hurt people for my own pleasure, for that thrill of justice it gives me."

"You're an angel of vengeance, my love," said Hannibal proudly. "Tell me, did you feel a thrill of justice when you helped me murder the man in the woods?"

"I felt like I was protecting you, but I was riding a tidal wave, Hannibal. I finally knew what you'd been hiding from me, and it was so close to what lives in me, it changed my whole reality forever. But I wouldn't premeditate killing someone unless I knew for sure they were guilty of something truly terrible."

Hannibal kissed the inside of Will's palm, his voice rumbling into the skin. "My only usual criteria is that the victim be intolerably rude."

"Hence Mr. Henderson down at the school?" Will raised his eyebrows and Hannibal smirked at him, proud as a peacock showing off his feathers. The more certain he became that Will would accept him, the more freely he revealed himself, including his admiration of his own crimes. But he wasn't all the way there yet...even now, he was holding back key details.

"Hence," Hannibal answered as he kissed each of Will's fingertips in turn. Will closed his eyes and let out a long breath.

"I'm trying to have a serious conversation with you, Hannibal, and that feels much, much too good..." He adored the way Hannibal handled him, how his lover knew when Will needed to be treated with great care and tenderness, and when he needed it rough, to be overtaken by the pleasure of pain.

"Don't pout. You are the one who climbed into my lap."

"You're the one who told me to stay." Will tugged Hannibal's shirt in a playful rebuke. "Anyway, I was recovering. I feel better now."

"Of course you do," Hannibal smiled, "Soon you'll be ready for me to help you feel even better."

"*Stop*," Will laughed and rolled his eyes. "Not yet. You're not going to use sex to extricate yourself from the potentially uncomfortable direction this conversation is heading in."

"Very well, then," Hannibal conceded, huffing a disappointed sigh. "I *ate* Mr. Henderson from down at the school."

Will thought he was beyond being surprised again, but that made his jaw drop almost cartoonishly. "You *what*?"

"Problem-solving is hunting," Hannibal shrugged. "The endgame of an honorable hunt is clear enough, don't you think?"

"Not really," Will sighed, taking his hand from around Hannibal's shoulder to press to his own knitted brow. "Are there any other details of your hobby that you'd like to tell me about?"

"That covers my *modus operandi* rather succinctly."

Will's disbelieving stare finally caused Hannibal to scoff, "You disapprove of my treatment of that disrespectful and idiotic gym teacher? You would perhaps have preferred for the art department to lose its funding if he managed to sway the PTA and superintendent to his argument? And what then of your precious stepson Walter and his love of painting?"

"Jesus, don't get catty. God, you're really pulling out all the stops to try and distract me. *Yes*, Hannibal, I disapprove of you killing people just for being rude. If you want to be with me, that needs to change."

“My child,” Hannibal said in feigned shock and dismay.

Will batted his shoulder. “Oh please, you don’t care that I just took the Lord’s name in vain twice. And I’m pretty sure even God would admit I had good enough reason to use extreme language here. Answer me directly, please, *Father*.”

“Are we to perform a full background check on any potential victims in future, to make sure they have been sufficiently evil to provoke your murderous ire and let me off my leash?”

“Yes, Hannibal. There are enough cruel people in the world, I’m sure the moment will come. Then another...you’ll have to help me learn how to do it. I know now that I’ve gone down that road with you I can’t turn back, I don’t want to. If I’m willing to change for you, give into myself, evolve and become, can you do the same for me?”

“And my evolution...my becoming is into a man enough in love with you that I cannot deny you any rules you choose to impose on my habits?” Hannibal was biting back a smile that told Will he had already surrendered to the new commandment.

“Exactly. Now, see, was that so terribly hard? Having an actual, open conversation without using tricks to try and control how it went or how I reacted?” Will ran his fingers through Hannibal’s hair again, all the way from the loose fringe drifting over his brow to the silky locks at his nape. The gesture had the effect of keeping Hannibal’s eyes reverently locked to his own.

“It was very difficult for me, Will. But for you, I will endeavor to improve my capacity for the truth...if *only* for you.”

“Good. Because I’ve got something else to say, and you’re not going to like it. At all.”

Hannibal’s smile faded to a suspicious frown. “Oh?”

“Oh. It’s about Molly and Walter.” Will kept stroking Hannibal’s hair, roving his other hand over the strong muscles in his lover’s arm, marveling at the docile way his beast leaned into his every touch, the way Will’s fingers could make Hannibal’s stressed, heavier breathing slip back to steady and calm. *Relatively* calm, that is. Hannibal’s jaw was tensing tighter by the second and he was getting that cute little crease in his forehead. Cannibals really should not be so cute, but there was nothing Will could do to help his fondness, which only seemed to be multiplying over time.

Will waited for a reply, but Hannibal returned his statement with only a steely silence.

“You’re not going to touch one hair on their heads,” Will continued. “I know you’d love to--”

“I would love to kill Molly,” Hannibal acknowledged. “I detest her. The idea of your being married to another makes my stomach clench and my blood boil. She has had her vile lips and hands all over you, and I want to rip her to--”

“Stop it,” Will chided with a brief, soft slap to one high cheekbone. He pointed at Hannibal, who glowered, not appreciative of being scolded. *A little taste of your own medicine*, Will

thought with a tinge of amusement. “Don’t talk about her like that. She’s a wonderful person, and I’m breaking her heart. I’m leaving her for you, that’s enough. You’ll never hurt her, or I’ll be so fucking mad at you, you’ll regret it *badly*. Understand?”

“Vividly,” Hannibal scowled.

“Hey,” Will said more softly, cupping Hannibal’s proud, haughty, offended and disappointed face. So many shades of ego and adorable conflict in one expression. “I also need to go home.”

Hannibal’s mouth dropped open in aggravated surprise. “One more time!” Will clarified. “One more time, to tell Molly goodbye. She deserves that closure.”

“She deserves absolutely nothing, least of all to have ever laid a finger on you,” Hannibal sniffed, getting even more irritated.

“My jealous, naughty, smug, very much adored *lover*,” Will murmured, letting his voice go velvety in the way which he knew Hannibal found especially intoxicating. “I will come back to you. Do you believe me?”

Hannibal shivered, incapable of escaping Will’s intense, plaintive eyes. He looked like he wanted to scream or at least wrench himself out from under Will and start a full-on argument, but he did neither.

“I want to believe you.”

Will could tell he was chewing on the inside of his cheek in an unsuccessful attempt to stave off his intolerable frustration. “Please don’t do that,” he entreated. “Please believe me for no other reason than because I said so.”

“I can only promise you to try,” Hannibal answered, barely holding himself together, as if he was already telling himself Will would not return.

How else to protect himself, just in case this occurred? The stubborn, secretly sweet bastard. Well, sweet only for Will. And while Will had no intention of wasting that fragile gift, he also wasn’t about to cave in and give up on his intention of breaking things off with Molly in person.

He felt one hundred percent morally obligated to do so, but at the same time he dreaded it. This was going to hurt like hell. He had to go back to his "home," which had never felt like one, through little fault other than his own. One more time.

Molly’s face was expressionless when Will came into the living room and found her sitting on the couch, a coffee mug between her hands. It was midday, and Walter was at school.

“Did you come back to get your stuff?” she asked flatly.

Will almost flinched, but he recognized he hadn't earned the right. "No, I came back to talk with you. To tell you the truth." He sat beside her and she immediately moved to the furthest cushion on the end, occasioning him an unintended flashback of the day he'd huddled on that same spot, afraid to accept Hannibal's affection, right before he lost himself to it fully, forever.

Molly swallowed hard, her eyes glazed over with tears. She stared at the wall and nodded.

"To say I've handled this horribly, and I'm so sorry," Will continued.

He wanted to take her hand, offer her some solace, but he knew she would push him away and he could not blame her. After all, she was right; what kind of asshole would he be if he tried to make this easier on himself under the pretense of comforting her? There was no way forward through this that had anything to do with a good feeling, he was sure.

"You've *humiliated* me by being blatantly unfaithful, you've abandoned me -- but that happened a long time before *he* showed up, right?" Molly swiped angrily at her tears. "You've been gone for ages."

"I was gone when I met you, Molly." Will flexed his fingers over his knees, feeling with excruciating accuracy the truth of how much a villain he was here.

"I guess on some level I knew that," she admitted, standing up, crossing her arms so tightly it looked like it must hurt. She blew out a breath so hard her bangs bounced slightly. "We were both empty, in recovery, thinking we could save each other from that loneliness. I know what did it for me, it was Ray's death. What about you, Will? What were you hiding from when you married me?"

"I think it's better you don't know those details," Will said cautiously. "Really, Molly. It won't help anything and it will only upset you more."

"Something to do with your old job, I always assumed. But go ahead and keep your secrets." She released her arms with an exasperated sigh, pulling her sweater sleeves down over her fingertips. After biting her lip and nodding to herself for a few moments, she added, "You're a jerk."

"I know I am. I thought we could work it out, but deep down, I knew we couldn't. I never should have strung you along like that on false hope. The only excuse I can offer is that my intentions were good, but I know that's hollow."

"It's really, *really* fucking hollow, Will. And weak."

He nodded. "I know. I'm sorry. I don't mean to sound like a broken record, it's just that--"

"Are you gay?" Molly asked abruptly. "I mean, is that what it's about, with him?"

"I'm pretty sure I'm bisexual," Will answered, blushing because he'd never said it out loud before. "It's not because I needed to be with...I just need to be with *him*."

"Wonderful," she groaned, trembling against more stifled tears.

“Molly--”

“Fantastic, good for you, good for *Father Lecter* -- so is he gonna leave the priesthood for you or what?”

He shrugged. What a vastly complicated question. “I don't know that yet.”

“Shut up, never mind.” She squeezed her eyes shut and clamped a hand to her forehead like it ached. “You’re the worst. You know, that guy Hal from my book club has been flirting with me for like two years now and I’ve been turning him down all this time.”

Her emotions were confused, utterly muddled, running from heartbroken to sarcastic to randomly, sardonically amused. This was a type of inner landslide which Will understood completely.

“Maybe I should give him a call,” she finished with a large helping of sass.

“Maybe you should,” Will said, his voice gentle and free from judgement.

“Maybe I will!” she shouted. Then she blinked, shocked by her own volume and vigor. “Wow, I just really let you have it, huh?” She laughed and cried a little more. “You’re not the worst, Will.”

“I kind of am,” Will conceded. How strange, that he could be the worst, a life-ruiner for one person and the light of someone else’s life. “Don’t feel bad for saying that, or anything else you’d like to get out of your system, I’ve earned it.”

“No, you haven’t, and frankly, that pisses me off more than anything else. We just got married for the wrong reasons and we were too polite to admit it until life forced us to.” She sat down beside Will, still at a distance although her posture was less defensive.

“Fuck, man!” Molly gave another painfully poignant laugh. “Life.”

“Yeah,” Will acknowledged, giving her one of his grimace-smiles, this time completely sincere.

In another life, maybe they could have been friends someday, but the safest thing for her was that he and Hannibal remove themselves from her world as soon as possible.

Chapter End Notes

I know I've left a few key points dangling here! Some hints of what's to come for anyone who would like them:

- Closure between Will and Walter, and regarding the dogs.
- A little confrontation between Molly and Hannibal 😊

-And obviously, the Hannigram smut we've been building up to all this time! 😏
....Plus the exciting revelation of whether I can contain all that in one final chapter! 😁

Forever

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will had to give Walter credit for summoning a mild, if not entirely convincing look of surprise when he came home from school to find his mother and stepdad in Very Serious mode, sitting in the kitchen waiting to give him the news of their separation. Walter hung his backpack up and gave his mother a hug, then got a snack and sat at the center island, nodding as they explained their plans.

“Okay,” he shrugged eventually, “Can I keep some of the dogs?”

“I thought I’d just take Winston,” Will smiled gently, “You and Mom can keep the rest, if you want to. Just send me pictures of them sometimes, huh? Let me know how they're doing. I know you'll take great care of them.”

“I want to!” Walter grinned, relieved. “Awesome, thanks D-- I mean, Will.”

Molly winced like she wished it was five o’clock and she had the excuse to have a drink to get through this. Will nodded, feeling amazingly awkward. The kid was taking it so well, it was like Will had been a shoddy stepdad, but in his heart he didn’t think that was really true. He’d worked hard to make both Molly and Walter happy, but in the end, that’s all it was: work. And it showed. This honesty was a release of pent-up energy, all the labor he’d put into this project of their family.

When Molly left to go and take a nap, Will told Walter again he was sorry. In announcing the split, they hadn’t told the boy about Will’s affair, but Will infused the apology with all the emotion of that, anyway.

“It’s fine,” Walter assured him blandly. He cleaned off his snack plate and put his glass in the sink. “I know you tried.”

Will gripped the counter, feeling with momentary frustration how completely clear an assumption it was that Molly was blameless, that if the marriage had crumbled, it had to be Will’s fault. Will, the FBI reject runaway, the ultimate square cog, walking around in his overly empathetic, too-imaginative introverted fog, unreachable. He was tired of being seen that way, so simplistically, tired of everything being his fault and his own exhausting tendency to accept that supposed truth. But Walter didn’t deserve his anger on the subject. So he smiled with a little too much teeth and nodded.

“I tried.”

Molly came by the rectory the next evening while Hannibal was cooking dinner and Will was out taking Winston for a walk. Hannibal heard a car pulling into the drive and stepped outside

curiously, wondering if it was yet another parishioner stopping by to beg him not to follow through on his plan to leave the priesthood, pleading with him to remain their pastor.

It was tiring to be responsible for so much perfection that people didn't want to see him go, but if Hannibal must listen to one or two more speeches begging him to remain in town, he would simply have to suffer through hearing how wonderful he was once again.

He was slightly surprised to see who had come, since he'd been under the impression Will had already brought everything from home he wanted to keep. Since there wouldn't be any need for Will to see his soon-to-be-ex-wife again, Hannibal had relaxed in the relieved expectation that they had seen the last of her irritating goody-goody face.

"Father," she chirped, stepping out of the car and circling it to open the truck.

"We really must stop meeting like this," Hannibal remarked, apropos of their encountering each other again outside next to a car.

While humor laced his tone, announcing his intention to remain coldly impenetrable to her resentment, the pure hatred in his eyes was unmistakable. He imagined how easy it would be to snap her neck, and one corner of his mouth turned up.

Molly strode towards him with a large cardboard box in her arms, which she launched at him just in time for him to catch it ably.

"May I offer you a cup of tea?" Hannibal asked as she remained silent, glaring at him and analyzing him simultaneously.

How he hated her soft-cheeked face, attractively shaped lips and cornflower eyes, so mild, incapable of true menace. He hated her jeans and that horrid tan jacket, probably ordered from LL Bean or the like. The way she was everything Hannibal could never be, things Will had thought so strongly that he wanted. Small, soft, gentle and kind; domestic and down-to-earth, *normal*. Safe.

"I was just about to make dinner for Will and I," Hannibal added, placing a satisfying emphasis on his lover's name. *Mine. Never yours again.* "I'd invite you to stay, but that might be a bit awkward."

Molly had remained studying him in smoldering anger throughout his whole performance. Finally she said, pointing at the fading bruise on his cheek from the fight in the woods, "Looks like someone had the right idea."

Hannibal smiled, pleased to see she was finally sinking low enough to show petty jealousy. "I'll just bring this inside."

He carried the box in, noticing it was labeled "Will's stuff," and felt certain it was probably filled with semi-useless ephemera, a mere excuse to come by and see for herself how he and Will were living, to confront them, perhaps. As such, Hannibal set the box down on the floor in the kitchen and slid it neatly against the back wall, where it would be conveniently near the garbage can.

Speaking with a sprightly, serene politeness, he said, “I assure you, whatever your real reason for coming here today, Will is beyond listening to any more of your manipulative tactics.”

“My manipulative tactics?” Molly demanded, going red in the face. She reeled back and slapped him hard on the unbruised cheek, using all the strength in her petite body to land a potent blow.

“They missed a spot,” she glowered, looking immediately pleased with her work. Hannibal’s cheek where she’d hit him felt hot and stung; there must be a red mark there now.

“I warn you,” Hannibal frowned, “I won’t stand here and listen to your tirades, nor play the conniving husband thief for your one woman production of ‘The Wronged Wife.’”

“You arrogant, despicable son of a bitch,” Molly fumed, “You don’t blame yourself for any of this at all, do you?”

“This is hardly a situation of blame,” Hannibal maintained, remaining as calm as he could, although by now he physically bristled, trembling with the desire to attack. “Love happens, as surely as life does, and as unpredictably.”

“Will is my *husband*.” Molly blinked back tears, looking infuriated with herself for letting them show.

Hannibal smiled smugly. “Not anymore.”

“Do you know what I had to do yesterday?” Molly walked towards him until the only way for Hannibal to keep his promise to Will of not lashing out and killing her was to back up for every step she took. Finally, he ended up with his back on the wall by the door and Molly’s finger planted on his chest.

Her eyes blazed at him as her voice went tight with anguish. “I had to lie to Will and pretend to love him less than I really do, because if he knew how much this was killing me, he’d never forgive himself.”

Hannibal reached down and lightly removed her hand from where her fingertip was jabbing into his shirtfront. “You care so much about Will that you would conceal your misery in order to let him be happy? Oh, Molly, how selfless.” With a poisonous smile, he added, “You really must think your love for him is superior to mine in every way.”

“Think?” She shook her head vehemently. “I know it is, you smarmy bastard. And as a final parting gift, I’ve got one more thing to tell you. It’s the reason why I stopped by today.”

“Oh? Pray tell,” He invited, admiring the knives in their wooden holder on the counter just behind her.

It would be so easy to slit her throat as a reply to her repulsive words, her attempt to keep some kind of hold on Will through guilt, as she had been doing for years. If only he believed Will would ever forgive him if he did such a (completely understandable, in his opinion)

thing. Did she think Hannibal would break down in his own regret for being a home-wrecker and actually tell Will about her real feelings? Ha! She was ridiculous.

“Will fell out of love with me and left me behind the moment someone new and flashy came on the scene,” she informed him, an eerie smile tweaking her lips. There was a malevolence in her eyes that, despite his hatred, impressed him involuntarily. “What makes you so sure he won’t do the same exact thing to you, once the shine wears off? Once someone prettier or smarter or more fascinating comes on the scene wanting him, because other people will *always* want him, why do you think he won’t leave you in the dust, too?”

Hannibal opened and closed his mouth, feeling unfortunately rather like a dead fish all of a sudden. All possible retorts evaporated from his mind as a horrible panicked blend of fear and jealousy invaded his consciousness like venomous smoke.

“I love him, I always will, but he’s not perfect, he has his foibles like all of us,” Molly continued. “He can’t be faithful. You know it and I know it. We wouldn’t be here now if he was capable of real commitment, now would we?”

She smiled, and in that moment Hannibal thought their hatred for each other was *almost* equal. But it could never be, because she would never have to wonder again if she was going to lose Will; she would not have to wake up every morning afraid he might not be in the bed beside her. Her chance was gone, but her words left Hannibal worrying that his own relationship with the man he loved so obsessively had an unpredictable but inevitable expiration date.

Upsettingly, this said much more about his own self-doubt than it did about Will. Molly underestimated Will absurdly by claiming he could never be faithful, and she probably knew it. But the part about getting left behind once someone better came along struck a chord within Hannibal, reflecting his carefully hidden belief that he was too strange to ever be fully loved. He frowned, feeling around in the pitch black warzone of his mind for some clever retort that would leave her shaking in her boots. Instead, he stayed pinned to the wall as if something held him there, although Molly was standing several paces back with her arms crossed by now.

In the heavy silence between them, the sound of the door clicking open made Hannibal startle visibly.

“Molly?” Will asked, confused, coming inside with Winston on his heels.

Winston took one look at the scene unfolding and opted to trot through to the living room.

Molly. If I never have to hear him say that obnoxious name again, it will be too soon!
Hannibal scowled.

Molly’s face softened slightly. “Hi Will.”

Will nodded, then looked at Hannibal, noticing the handprint on his face, starting to fade now, but still obviously indicating what had occurred. He sighed and caressed the wounded cheek, saying to Molly without looking at her, “You *hit* him?”

“Pretty funny how you assume that if there’s been a fight, I must have started it,” Molly snarked.

“Well, he wouldn’t have,” Will said, stroking Hannibal’s cheek again. The pressure of his long, slightly calloused fingers over the fresh throbbing pain in Hannibal’s face was a deep, incomparable pleasure. “I told him not to.”

Hannibal’s stiff posture relaxed, and his eyes on Will were beseeching in a way that baffled the younger man. He put his other hand on Hannibal’s shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze before he stepped away to deal with Molly.

“Thank you for bringing the rest of my things,” Will said flatly, nodding to the box on the floor. “But I think you should go now.”

“I’ll do that,” she nodded, and right before she left, Hannibal had the shallow enjoyment of watching the flicker of complete despair in her eyes.

“So what are you making for dinner?” Will smiled, coming up behind Hannibal as his lover arranged some vegetables on the counter for chopping.

The oven was preheated, lending a warmth to the kitchen which did not entirely account for the flush in Hannibal’s cheeks.

“Arctic char in cranberry dijon sauce with creme fraiche chive mashed potatoes and pecan-studded vegetables.” Hannibal answered breezily, but his body was cold and too sturdy, held up once again like a statue.

Will snuggled his face into Hannibal’s neck, placing a few softly sweet kisses. His hand caressed over Hannibal’s waist and belly, avoiding the spots he knew to be ticklish, just trying to make it feel good. “That sounds amazing. You don’t have to go through all that trouble, you know.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

“My boyfriend the 5 star gourmet chef,” said Will proudly. He patted Hannibal’s cute, slightly soft middle once more, then left him in peace and full mobility again.

“It’s nothing, Will, as I indicated. Cooking is one of my favorite tasks, and nothing could please me more than to give you something nice. I hope you will simply relax and enjoy it.”

With these sincere but tense words spoken, Hannibal expertly peeled and chopped the potatoes, moving so quickly that Will thought it was a bit robotic, like the blank, distracted look on his face.

Chewing his lower lip as he uncorked a bottle of cabernet, Will considered the encounter between his present lover and almost ex-wife which he had interrupted. Just what exactly had passed between them that left Hannibal so shaken?

Finally, as Hannibal began arranging the fish and veggies on the baking sheets, looking absolutely forlorn, Will decided the only acceptable approach was the direct one.

“I’m sorry that Molly dropped by unannounced like that. You okay?”

“I’m fine,” Hannibal answered, avoiding eye contact, setting the oven timer and brushing off his apron. The absent-minded gesture left potato and carrot peelings on the floor. “I’ll just get the broom.”

“Wait.” Will took Hannibal’s hands and drew him close. Will’s back edged against the counter under the window, late afternoon sunlight drifting in to cast a golden glow over his concerned face. “What’s the matter? Please tell me. Did she say something...”

“Your eyes are green in this light,” Hannibal sighed, cupping Will’s face, stroking his jawline with that same reverence which set Will a bit more at ease. Very seriously, as if he couldn’t help himself, he added, “I don’t want to be your boyfriend, Will. I want you to be mine forever.”

“Why do you sound so sad?” Will demanded tenderly. He searched his lover’s elegant but stressed features for some clue to the conundrum. “Of course I’m yours forever, and you’re mine, Hannibal.”

The way he spoke Hannibal’s name was heady, sensuous, adoring. It made a hesitant smile lift Hannibal’s plush lips, hope sparking again in his pretty brown eyes.

“What did Molly say to make you doubt my feelings?” Will felt more genuinely angry with Molly than he ever had.

Nobody hurt Hannibal in any way, not on his watch, and no matter how strong or justified the reasons. They were three people in a crazy situation, and spitefulness wasn’t going to solve a damn thing.

“It’s not you I doubt, it’s...” Hannibal ducked his head, unaccountably bashful. “I can’t give you a normal life, Will.” His fingers drifted up to cling to Will’s shirt at his sides, almost wistfully, like touching something he knew he couldn’t keep. “I can’t ever be that for you. As a result, I have to admit I’m feeling somewhat lacking at present.”

“What exactly did you think I was trying to tell you when I left my wife and came here, right into your arms?” Will had thought his intentions were completely transparent, but now he saw how wrong he had been. “Did you think I still wanted a normal life? After what happened the other night...how could you be worried about that? We became, we were one, we were covered in blood together, and the way you touched me...”

Will kissed Hannibal’s stubbornly pursed lips, finding that they opened to him helplessly, the hands by his sides tightening, getting possessive. “The way it felt when I came for you. Hannibal, can’t you feel that we’re two pieces of the same person? I’ve been dragging myself through years in some kind of despairing half-alive stupor, and now, with you, finally I’m *alive*, and I’m ecstatic.”

Hannibal kissed him back, soft, fluttery kisses, getting wetter and more open, his hands sliding up Will's back, grabbing on roughly. Needing to know, to feel how much Will belonged to him.

Well, Will thought, grinning into the next kiss, that was easy to show him.

"I love you," Will whispered, and their hands flew into automatic action, undressing each other, uncaring of the window behind them with its open curtains.

Hannibal sat him on the counter and began desperately kissing him all over, starting with his toes and the tops of his feet, then the arches, the ankles, up his calves, each press of his lips a separate and profound act of worship. No one had ever kissed Will like this, as though his body was a map to paradise and every single inch must be savored, but the experience could never be enough because Hannibal could not be doing it every second of every day and night. The older man groaned softly, clutching Will's thighs, kissing, then biting his knees, Will's fingers tight in his hair.

Will had a moment of surreal disbelief as Hannibal's hot, devouring mouth poured breath and moist kissing sucks up his thighs, as those deadly fangs pinched his tender skin and he moaned in response, guiding Hannibal higher, towards his aching cock, which stood to bulging attention, dying to be touched and tasted. Never in a million years would he have dreamed one day he'd be here, naked on a kitchen counter with a gorgeous, haunting, all-encompassing man like this making love to him, and here they were. No one had ever made him feel as if he would really, *really* die if the next kiss didn't come fast enough, if he didn't get another taste of this perfect, painful, too-intense pleasure, but it was real, this was happening.

Hannibal twirled his tongue around the head of Will's cock and immediately moaned, lost in the delirium of tasting him there, the precum dribbling onto his eager, softly exploring tongue, the feel of Will's rigid shaft smoothly hot in his hand. The older man sighed out a gorgeous speech which must have been in his native language; Will had never heard anything so beautiful before, the way Hannibal's voice huskily traced the words, quiet, amazed exclamations, his breath hot against Will's by now very damp cock.

"Oh, God!" Will cried, tugging his hair. A jolt of euphoria surged through him from the combined sensations, and Hannibal smiled up at him, tender and entranced.

Then the priest began to suck him in earnest, jerking him in careful timing with the long, deep, enveloping movements of his mouth -- careful at first, but then Will's hectic sighs and gasps made Hannibal wilder. He sucked his cheeks tightly and took Will in to the hilt, happily gagging on him as Will's hips arched into Hannibal, driving his cock into that exquisite, silky wet heat. The tightness and pressure were so fucking good, he could have screamed, but for some reason all his body could manage were short, desperate, breathy little sighs.

Hannibal pulled his mouth off, pressed his forehead to Will's and said in a devilish, gritty voice, "I love the sounds you make when I pleasure you. I love it more than anything."

"Don't stop," Will begged, clinging to him, his fingers sliding from the glory of those broad shoulders down to the sexy muscles in his chest, the dusting of greying hair there where his

hand stroked through to circle and tease darkly rosy, hardening nipples. Hannibal caught his breath, his heart pounding feverishly under Will's hand. "Don't-stop, don't-stop, give me everything, Hannibal."

He knew his words were coming nonsensically, but at least he got the point across. Hannibal scooped him up in his strong arms and brought him to the bedroom, laying him down so that Will had no time to question how the hell his lover carried him as if he weighed nothing, or how it was possible for anything to feel as good as this did, the sense of being completely claimed and doted on, his power and the way Hannibal conquered him equally.

"Jesus..." Will cried out as Hannibal crawled down the bed and lifted his legs to bite the backs of his thighs, "Oh, my God, please..." The big, strong hands cupped and squeezed his ass and Will's cock twitched hard. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, Hannibal..."

"My dear," Hannibal smiled with his mouth poised over Will's entrance as the younger man watched him in a lustful daze, holding his own legs back and moaning. "Your instincts are impeccable. Look at you, how you hold yourself open and ready for me."

"I've never, but...I've been thinking about it nonstop since the moment I saw you," Will admitted breathlessly. "You inside me, every way you can be. It's what I need, to feel you taking me over."

Hannibal looked so proudly at Will's blushing face. "My good boy." He leaned in closer and licked directly at Will's hole, skipping any further teasing so that Will cried out in surprise, swearing profusely at the sensation of Hannibal's tongue broadly, softly opening him more and more. Soon he was dripping, his cock laying heavy against his stomach, though he knew better than to lift a hand to stroke it and take his own pleasure. He had surrendered to Hannibal's command, and would respect this rule with the strictest, most delighted obedience.

"Oh," Hannibal breathed hotly against his ass, licking and sucking at him, biting his ass cheeks, reaching up to wrap his large fingers around Will's cock and pump him slowly. "So perfect. My darling, be mine."

"Yes." Will reached for Hannibal, drawing him closer for more, more, every kiss he could take from lips naughty and covered with his own masculine heat and musk, the way he could wrap his arms and legs around his lover and grind up into him, how this made Hannibal growl and pull his hair, then bite his neck so hard it broke the skin. He yelped, only holding on tighter, crying out Hannibal's name and begging for more.

Blood coated Hannibal's lips and flavored the next kiss, and Hannibal was doing something with the hand that wasn't roving hard and demanding through Will's curls. He was reaching, finding the bedside table drawer, grabbing a bottle of lube he kept there, and a condom. Soon his slick, beautiful fingers were pressing into Will, getting him even readier. Hannibal kissed him again and again as if he, too, was living only by the grace of each one they shared. He fucked Will relentlessly, deeper with three fingers by now, nudging his prostate so that the younger man scratched at his back and mewled.

“Mylimasis,” Hannibal smiled down at him, caressed his burning, sweaty face, delved a thumb into his mouth for Will to suck on, beside himself with obsession and excitement. “I don’t think you’re going to be able to help cursing quite a few more times once you have this inside you. Am I right?”

He pressed the blunt head of his condom-covered erection right to Will’s wet, fluttering hole, and Will shook his head vehemently. “God! Jesus, fuck, no, I won’t be able to help it.”

“Say that more politely, please,” Hannibal requested, a very mischievous gleam in his caramel eyes as he loomed over Will and teased him.

“I’m sorry, Father,” Will panted, shaking all over, “I can’t help myself. I know I’m going to swear. I’ll take the Lord’s name in vain because your cock feels so good inside me, I won’t be able to control myself.”

“I’ll control you then,” Hannibal soothed, making another deep, elated shiver rack Will’s tensed body. He roved his hands over Will’s chest, his sides and hips, then groped his ass before lining himself up in earnest. “My child.”

“Fuck,” Will blurted, lost in the pleasure of this first penetration by his lover’s thick, powerful cock. Hannibal had only just entered him, a few inches to let him adjust to the sweet intrusion, and Will wanted more so badly he could barely breathe. He hitched his legs up higher around Hannibal’s back to make himself even more open and appealingly available. “Say it again, say it again to me.”

“My child,” Hannibal grunted, sliding in further, kissing the side of Will’s face, then tugging his earlobe with his teeth. Will stroked his toes down Hannibal’s back and the older man growled, delving deeper, then deeper, carefully -- adding more lube, then as Will moaned louder, he slammed in, so fucking *good*, hitting Will’s prostate and making him whimper. “My good, special, beautiful, beloved boy.”

Hannibal pinned Will’s wrists hard into the sheets and fucked him soundly, crying out as he marveled at the way Will’s tight entrance squeezed around him, the velvety heaven that was Will inside, rendered slick and ready and his own for the taking. Hannibal couldn’t help his loss of composure into roughness, the harsh edge of passion they both needed. “You’re perfect, Will.”

“I didn’t-- God, oh my God, yes, right there -- please, please don’t stop!”

“You didn’t what, my child?” Hannibal asked, slowing down in curiosity and more damn, unforgivable, teasing as Will moaned in deprivation, hungry for more of those deep, demanding, hard thrusts.

“I didn’t know sex could be like this,” Will answered around a sob, tears sliding down his cheeks. “You’re everything to me.”

“My love,” Hannibal moaned, kissing his tears away, treating him to another round of long, deep, rapturous pounding strokes, and Will felt answering teardrops spilling from Hannibal’s eyes onto his own face.

Somewhere in the beautiful, messy haze of it all, Hannibal slid from him and helped him to turn over. Will went along as obedient and clueless as a ragdoll, lying down like a pillow princess as Hannibal put a commanding hand on his low back, then slid back into him, keeping him flat to the bed where he could thrust in so deeply, Will thought he would split open. Every gorgeous, bliss-giving drive of Hannibal inside him made him feel in complete disbelief, how was it possible that he could fit inside Will so easily, when Hannibal felt, honestly -- huge, and Will was so tight he ached and keened with the pressure and roughness -- yes --

“*Yes!*” Will cried, “Yes, please!”

Hannibal drew him up onto his knees, holding Will against his hairy chest, thrusting slowly and deeply in and out of him as he began to stroke Will’s weeping cock. Will looped his arm around Hannibal’s head and he moved his ass greedily in time with every glide of Hannibal’s dick. He moaned and swore as Hannibal praised him and called him such a good boy, just like in his forbidden fantasy but even better, and Will’s heart squeezed with overwhelming love and happiness. His body tensed even more, his heart pounding and sweat slicking them both as Hannibal cried out, “Oh, Will -- *Will*--”

And Hannibal was coming, pulsing inside him, hips slamming into him repeatedly; the two of them smelled like Hannibal’s fancy soap and shampoo and their sweat, the musk of their love. Hannibal kept stroking Will’s cock and held his hip in a vice grip with his other hand, ruthlessly fucking to ride out the pleasure of his climax. Will burst suddenly, silently, throwing his head back as Hannibal bit his neck again, then licked his skin, stroking Will from base to tip even as his own body began to quiver from overstimulation and staying inside Will longer than he should have after orgasming.

He didn’t want to leave, Will realized as Hannibal kept him held there, tight against his body, and he had to tell him softly as he nearly swooned with residual tremors of pleasure, “It’s okay, we’ll do this every day, as long as we live. I promise. You’re not going to lose me.”

Hannibal groaned, holding Will’s shoulder hard now as he pulled himself out. He collapsed slightly, heaving deep breaths that seemed to come more from powerful emotion than overexertion, although he had surely exhausted himself. Will felt like he hadn’t played nearly as active a role in their mutual pleasure -- although they would have plenty of time for that, too -- and he was fucking about to faint again, his body was so totally spent, heavy and buzzing with aftershocks of pure delight.

He lay on his back, limbs splayed wherever they landed, curls matted to his forehead in a sweaty mess, heart hammering and breath gradually steadying as he waited for Hannibal to dispose of the condom in the bathroom and come back to him. Hannibal returned with an alcohol swab and cleaned the wound on Will’s neck, and somehow even that seemed erotic. Will watched him with widened eyes, taking the sting of the medicine as his latest source of pleasure. It was just another extension of being hurt and cared for in the most loving way he could imagine, something private shared and thoroughly understood between them.

Hannibal kissed his chest, then laid his head there as Will drew him close, stroking his hair and humming contentedly, wrapping his other arm around Hannibal’s shoulder and back.

They lay there with no need whatsoever to speak, cuddling and absorbing each other's warmth (Hannibal's skin wasn't its usually cool, calm temperature now, Will thought proudly, with a flash of smugness to rival his lover's usual attitude towards life). Then the oven timer beeped shrilly and Will giggled. "Shit, I forgot about dinner."

"I didn't," Hannibal winked, kissing his cheek before getting up and throwing a robe onto his naked body. Will loved how comfortable they were like this, that he wasn't even conscious of his own nudity as anything other than natural and a source of constant joy to his lover. He didn't think Hannibal would have skipped a shower at this juncture, except that dinner always took priority over anything but sex with Will. He wasn't about to let that lovely meal burn.

"Stay right here," Hannibal said in answer to Will's silence and how the younger man sat in bed smiling dopily at him, besotted. "We'll eat in bed."

While feeding each other the delicious meal and sharing the wine, they discussed their plans for the future.

"I thought we could just leave," Will explained with characteristic lack of foresight. "Let the horizon be our destination. My boat's nothing fancy, but she's strong, and big enough to sleep on. I'll sail us anywhere we feel like going. As for money, I can take odd jobs--"

"Only if you want to," Hannibal mused, setting his wine glass on the side table, looking adorable in his loosely corded robe, his hair falling softly over his brow. "I have plenty of money."

"Of course you do." Will chuckled and kissed him. "Fancy-pants. Anyway, will you do it, will you come with me?"

"Anywhere," Hannibal grinned. "Consider it decided. Although we may need a bit more of an itinerary than 'the horizon,' as romantic as that sounds, my dear. I need to feel organized in order to go about any plan, no matter how impetuous."

"We'll make a travel plan, then. Write down everywhere you wanna go." He paused when they heard Winston's "hello, everyone, I'm awake again" bark, very short and soft. "I'll go feed him." Will kissed Hannibal and put on a pair of boxers, then gathered their empty plates. "*And I'll come back with our dessert.*"

A few minutes away, pensively tending to Winston as the dog merrily adapted to the new but temporary home, were enough to make Will reflect once again on how worried Hannibal had been by his encounter with Molly.

"I don't want you to worry like you were before," he said when he came back to the bedroom, his words surprising Hannibal due to the total lack of preamble.

He slid back into bed and passed Hannibal a plate of french silk pie with a hazelnut-cookie crust. Upon digging into his own dessert while Hannibal watched him with his brows still lifted curiously, Will moaned, "Are you serious? When did you even have time to make this? Anyway, please don't worry." He tried to make himself be sensible again, but it was hard

with Hannibal looking at him, showing that unique blend of affectionate humor and vulnerability.

"I think you have proved your point, Will," Hannibal replied. "I'll do my best to believe myself worthy of this unaccountably profound luck on my part, that we are soulmates, bound for life."

"Almost as if God sent me to you," Will winked. Hannibal gave him a comical scowl and tossed a throw pillow at him. Will lifted his plate of pie to keep it safe from the attack. "C'mon, you hypocrite. You think I haven't noticed you're not entirely evil? You may like working your mischief and punishing the rude, but I've also seen you happy as can be while running a soup kitchen and organizing a clothing drive. Maybe the big guy saw fit to reward you."

"My naughty angel," Hannibal grinned, "You're enough to make me believe anything is possible. Just don't expect me to become a devoutly religious man."

"Aren't you, though?" Will licked his lips of delicate chocolate and put the plate and fork aside. "Devout, when you're with me?"

"I believe in you," Hannibal acknowledged, "I believe in what we have become together, from the devilish to the divine." A hint of mischief crept back into his gaze as he added, "And I believe that those noises you allowed to escape your lips whilst eating your pie ensure that you are the only dessert I will need."

He put his own uneaten pie away, completely focused on Will.

"Really?" Will asked, blushing, "Again? We just?"

"Indeed we did." Hannibal laid Will down and began kissing him again as hungrily as ever, running his fingers over Will's biceps and across his pectorals, down his stomach, clutching his hips and biting one.

"Oh, I...*ohhhh*," Will sighed dreamily, his lashes fluttering under Hannibal's attentions, the warm perfection of his wandering lips and unpredictably sharp nips, the sweep of his wonderful, highly distracting tongue, "Hannibal, please, I should really be doing more to...all I did was lay there last time..."

"You were perfect, and you are perfect." Hannibal left a trail of fiery kisses back up Will's belly and chest, and Will tousled his silky hair with a breathy laugh. "You don't need to *do* anything but follow your instincts and be entirely yourself, Will."

"Really? What about all the swearing?" With a delighted groan, he managed to turn them over and get Hannibal under him. He straddled the older man and grinned down at him, palms planted to his chest, fingers merrily tangled in soft hair. "So *sinful* of me. I don't know how you tolerate it."

Hannibal gazed up at Will, tracing his cheek, then hooking his hands into the sides of his boxers, bumping his hips up slightly to brush their growing erections together. As Will

gasped in response, Hannibal smirked, “I’ll have to take your confession.”

“Bless me, Father,” Will began huskily, laying between Hannibal’s thighs and kissing him languidly, “For I have sinned. I believe it is only through strict punishment that I can find my redemption.”

“Oh?” Hannibal asked cheekily, groping his ass, then spanking him. “I think I can help you with that.”

They fell into each other with more kisses and then made slow, lingering, aching love that pushed them both to the limit of what they could endure without coming, drawing it out so that the pain redefined their joined euphoria.

“I’ll never, never leave you,” Will vowed as he lay on his side with Hannibal wrapped around him, fucking him with ardent sighs and countless kisses into his neck where the skin was deliciously sore with bite marks and fresh bruising. “I want you to marry me, I want to take you away with me, keep you all to myself.” Every word was a struggle to get out between breath-stealing thrusts and Hannibal’s animal grunts and growls, but Will made sure each declaration was audible, if somewhat pleasure-slurred. “Do you really believe me?”

“Yes,” Hannibal moaned, rocking into him even deeper, keeping Will locked and gathered in his addictive body heat and strength, “I believe we belong to each other now. Our love will last forever. God!”

Will smiled in a secret, softly pleased way to himself. Hannibal had cried out the Lord’s name so guilelessly while thrusting into Will’s tight body that he might not have even realized he slipped up, giving momentary praise to his creator. Admitting that he, Hannibal Lecter, was not all-powerful; he was only human, and there were mysteries, be they tragic or happy, which he would never understand.

“Will,” Hannibal sighed to his earthly God, and Will soothed him as he neared climax, repeating the words which had become their new mantra, their most sacred prayer, the words which one day would comprise their wedding vows.

“We belong to each other now,” Will sighed, reaching back to squeeze Hannibal’s ass, feeling the power of momentum as Hannibal fucked him, “Our love will last forever. I’ll never leave you.”

And he never did.

Chapter End Notes

-Don't worry about Molly. I'm pretty sure she called Hal from book club eventually and they lived happily ever after, too. 😊

-Needless to say, fic title from the Taylor Swift song. I was crying in Hannigram feels

immediately with that one (not that it isn't my default setting by now)
Thanks for reading, and hope you enjoyed the ending! 🥰

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